
ViRuS 23
No.$



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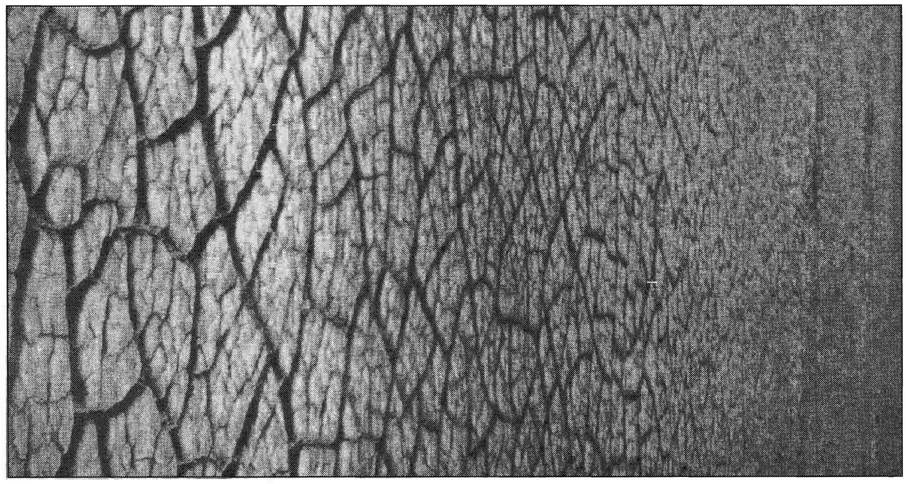
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ABSTRACTS



MEMEORABILIA

Strategy and Tactics

May you live in interesting times

Hello. Welcome to the third **Virus 23**. We're slowly beginning to understand what we're doing. Way cool man.

This issue was originally going to be about "Flesh," but it mutated into socio-anthropological navel-gazing. Whew.

So, you're holding a self-reflexive memetic program designed for **twenty-somethings**, (we hope it's of interest to others as well; we'll see soon enough). Theoretically, a generation-based iteration will stimulate the chaos inherent in our skewed world-views to allow fresh patterns to emerge. Isn't it strange that increased feedback is a key to new levels of order?

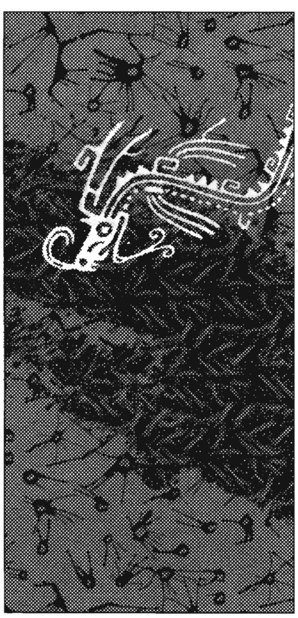
Peace & Love - Bruce & Eric.



1975: Bruce Emulates Christopher Lee, the Suavest Vampire.

Bruce's apologetic postscript: I'm sorry if you sent stuff to us that didn't appear in this issue, or (even worse) if I didn't write back to you. I'm bad with letters. To increase the likelihood of a reply, please address your letters to Eric; he's the responsible one.

Strange Narcissi – the MEME generation



We are **the MEME generation**.

MEME: "a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation." (Richard Dawkins, **The Selfish Gene** p.192).

A slightly inaccurately self-replicating entity with almost limitless power. "Given the right conditions, replicators automatically band together to create systems ... that carry them around and work to favor their continued replication" (Dawkins, p. 322). As a generation, we are such a system.

Twentysomethings. Generation X. The No Generation. The Over-the-Counter-Culture. Devolutionary Generation (are we not men?): memes, all of them. Slightly inaccurate copies, traces of an original (id)entity, impossible to recover. A Derridean Paradox: in an attempt to define us as a lack, a void, the media has only proliferated our name(s). We are legion.

One can speak of a **fractal subject**, which – instead of transcending into a finality beyond the self – is diffracted into a multitude of identical miniaturized egos. ... a strange Narcissus, no longer dreaming of his ideal image, but of a formula to genetically reproduce himself into infinity. -Jean Baudrillard, **The Ecstasy of Communication** (p.40).

MEME = meme (French: "the same"). *Quand il écrit «fractal», Baudrillard pense la même chose* (well, that's slightly inaccurate, but close enough. Excuse my French).

MEME = ME, replicating myself (virally) in language. No longer alone. ME and ME – there is a slight difference between the two – you and me. Us.

MEME = "ME" × 2. Me too: don't write us off as zero, or as a disembodied distorted reflection of you. We (are) matter.

MEME = "ME" 2 – The Sequel to the "ME" generation, but (at least) twice as interesting. The **(m)Em(e)pire Strikes Back**.

"Too much information / Running through my brain / Too much information / Driving me insane" –**The Police**: three old guys who couldn't hack it. The (crucial) difference between the "Me" generation and **the MEME generation** is that we **thrive** on information overload. The Revolution **will** be televised; we want maximum bandwidth.

It's only fitting that our average age is 23.*

We are **the MEME generation** because, obviously, we generate memes. It's a matter of SurViral.

With infinite laughter —Darren

* "Antihero," **Spin** 6.12 (March 91): 68.



A.D.o.S.A. Reality

There's no reason not to know

"I wonder if that's really true ... The cook always goes down with the ship?"
—Gary Larson

"Just say know."
—Dr. Timothy Leary

On January 9, 1992 CNN was within seconds of broadcasting 'news' of the death of the President of the United States, a certain George Herbert Walker Bush. This incident occurred when a 71-year-old man claiming to be the President's personal physician phoned CNN to announce George's death. This 'news' was rushed to the anchorperson on duty, who was about to reveal the 'tragic event' to the entire planet. But someone realized the information was a hoax (unlike crop circles), and it didn't make it out – but it was close.

With instantaneous information transfer, it's important to get all the facts before you make decisions. So you need more than one frame of reference. Unfortunately, most people rely on mass media, which reinforce how to behave, what to think, who to like, and whatever else we 'need' to live in this society. What we really need is a variety of perspectives, so we can decide how to conduct our lives. The easiest (and least expensive) way to expand your horizons is the post office. The following items recently appeared in my mailbox and could fire your synapses – they worked on me.

bOING bOING #7 (US$4.00 from P.O. Box 18432 Boulder, Colorado 80308 USA) Dubbed "the world's greatest neurozine" by its creators, Mark and Carla Frauenfelder, it's bursting with an amazing blend of technology, chaos, and a totally demented sense of humour. The latest issue contains a review of Chaos software (you haven't lived until you've seen a Mandelbrot set in action), how to build your own brain machines, cyberspace and the performing arts, Robert Anton Wilson on androphobia, Antero Alli on the imagination killers, bizarre fiction, comix and reviews galore. **bOING bOING** is one of the best brain chargers around and it's more fun than humans are supposed to have.

> "What he did not know then is that it is sometimes an appropriate response to reality to go insane."
>
> —Phillip K. Dick, **Valis**

Edge Detector #3 ($4.00 from Edge Detector, 1850 Lincoln Ave. #803, Montreal, Quebec H3H 1H4 Canada) A magazine of speculative fiction. If you enjoy intense, graphic writers, you'll want a copy of this. Edited by Glenn Grant (see "A Memetic Lexicon"), this anthology has a very professional look, strong illustrations and a clean layout. The stories are varied, gripping and even disturbing. The authors, some of whom have published extensively, are Charles Platt, Lyle Hopwood, Michael Cobley, Yves Maynard, Stephane Banfi, and death waits (who claims to be a soap bubble). Hmmm ... There's nothing else quite like it in Canada (that I know of). It's great reading, and well worth the money.

> "I had the strong sense, not for the first time, of young minds willing themselves into madness as a way of finding freedom."
>
> —J. G. Ballard, **Running Wild**

INTERTEK Vol. 3.2 (US$3.00 from Steve Steinberg, 325 Ellwood Beach, #3 Goleta, California 93117 USA) This deals with the societal effects of cutting-edge computer technology. It covers issues ranging from art to computer crime. This issue is about ethics and morality in a high-tech society, and includes interviews with Bruce Sterling and Brenda Laurel, articles on transferring consciousness into a computer (uploading), texture map graphics, Japanese electromagnetic ships, book and journal reviews, Virtual Reality updates, and the Magellan spacecraft. If you don't have a computer, buy one; if you don't have **INTERTEK**, buy one.

> "The spirit of creation is simply the spirit of contradiction."
>
> —Jean Cocteau in **Atlantic**

Psychedelic Monographs & Essays #4 & #5 (US$18.95 to PM&E Publishing Group, P.O. Box 4465, Boynton Beach, Florida 33424 USA) Highly recommended! These impressive soft-cover journals (with full-colour wrap-around covers: #4 is a fractal, while #5 is covered with photos of about forty kinds of blotter LSD) deal with a variety of aspects of the psychedelic experience, including sociology, cybernetics, literature, parapsychology and physiology. Each book contains scholarly, well researched articles on a variety of topics, from mushroom cultivation to MDMA legislation. An interview with William S. Burroughs and an article by Timothy Leary are highlights of #4, while #5 has a great interview with Dr. Oscar Janiger, founder of The Albert Hofmann Foundation. Both are entertaining and informative – and don't be put off by the price; these are guaranteed to enlighten your day and brighten your bookshelf. Besides, it's very hard to find serious drug research these days.

> "When I am feeling like an outsider it's simply because I think I'm more aware of the presence and closeness of chaos than other people are."
>
> —David Cronenberg in **The Shape of Rage**

The President Journal #5 ($3.00 from Chris Laurson, 5912 - 94A Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta T6B 0Y8 Canada) This digest-sized 'zine is loaded with mail art, interviews with interesting (but obscure) bands like *Shrinkwrap Propaganda* and *Illusion of Safety*, fiction, and reviews. It includes an article about last year's Toronto Film Festival, and insights into some strange gems I'll look for on video. It also has stuff about pirate radio, comics, and freedom of speech. Very well put together; Chris deserves your support.

> "There are trivial truths and the great truths. The opposite of a trivial truth is plainly false.The opposite of a great truth is also true."
>
> —Neils Bohr in **The New York Times**

The Magician's Dictionary: An Apocalyptic Cyclopædia of Advanced Magic(k)al Arts and Alternate Meanings by E.E. Rehmus, 1990. (U.S.$12:95 + $1:50 P&H) ISBN: 0-922915-01-6. Feral House, PO Box 861893, Los Angeles, California 90086-1893 USA.

The Magician's Dictionary is just that, a dictionary. It begins with Aaron (the brother of Moses ...), and ends with Zuvuya (The Mayan memory circuit hotline ...). I like the book, and

I've found it works very well as a general reference guide to basic concepts that are often quickly passed by with very little explanation in works of this nature. It's well researched, and contains a seven-page bibliography of Rehmus's sources, which include Isaac Asimov, Wade Baskin, Hakim Bey, David Bohm, Crowley, Philip K. Dick, Charles Fort, Dion Fortune and so on. Heavy Robert Anton/Colin Wilson influence as well. It's amused and informed me every time I've opened it. The definitions he presents are **generally** reasoned and reasonable, but they sometimes contain a 'subversive wit' that highlights his extreme personal views (which only makes it more entertaining). For example:

> *ZPG – "Zero Population Growth" is an idea whose time has come. What has that to do with M/magic(k)? Nothing more than that any practitioner who ignores the state of the world and attempts to avoid controversy out of cowardice, is a charlatan and an ass. The population of the earth will have reached 10 billion within another decade. The beautiful forests and magnificent animals that our grandparents knew are gone forever ...*
>
> *As for those, finally, who believe that natural parenting should be the divine right of every moronic pimp and cheap tart, rather than an earned and rare privilege, and who argue that anyone who tries to "play God" and set hirself up as a population damper can only be a "Fascist," such fools should be reminded that it hardly matters whether a Fascist, a Saint, a Yuppie or Zippy the Pinhead takes the job at this late date. If everyone's genes are to be sacrificed to the common good and if the said "God-player" is himself free of issue, it matters little who rules. In any case, any form of birth control, no matter how unjust or extreme, is preferable to that tyranny exercised so criminally now by those who, in their filth, stupidity, rut and obnoxious lust, blindly and selfishly birth endlessly forth their disgusting progeny in chaotic, cancerous growth, shoving and forcing the guilty in with the innocent in this already over-stuffed planetary rat-box of accelerating madness and asphyxiation.* (pp. 290-91)

Wow. Recite that to a pregnant friend, and see what kind of response you get. E.E. Rehmus can be contacted directly at PO Box 190667, San Francisco, California 94119 USA.

—Eric Fletcher

> "The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all art and science."
>
> —Albert Einstein
> in **Living Philosophies**

> "The spectacle is nothing more than an image of happy unification surrounded by desolation and fear at the tranquil centre of misery."
>
> —Guy Debord,
> **Society of the Spectacle**

Sensoria From Censorium: Other Ground Works. Comp. & Ed. John Marriot; Ass't Ed. Ich Neuman (Toronto: Mangajin Books, 1990. 180 pp.)

This is, first and foremost, a beautiful book. With its 8 1/2″ by 11″ format, full-colour cover ("Homage to Duchamp" by the editor) and perfect binding, it looks very much like a **Re/Search** publication. However, while each **Re/Search** project is focussed on a specific topic, **SFC** is an homage to the diversity of what Marriot and Neuman call "the Other Ground" (Catchy, eh? These boys read their French philosophy, and learned from Debord and co. the fine art of coining snappy neologisms). "It is about Networking in that it is **of** Networking," says Marriot on the first page. And, despite the reservations he expresses on the last page as to the limitations of any attempt to create a representative sampling of the infoculture, he's done a damn fine job.

It's divided into roughly six sections: articles, visuals, poetry, visual poetry, prose, and graphic narratives (nestled between the pages, there is also a hard-vinyl 45 from a band called *Mr. Science*, and a couple of very attractive postcards). There are names on the list of contributors that are immediately recognizable to those of us who live in our mailboxes – Mike Gunderloy, Hal McGee, Urania 235, **YAWN**, John Oswald, Ace Backwords – and many more that **should** be. The quality of the content is, over all, excellent, but Marriot and Neuman spent so much time on the layout that even the dodgy stuff looks great.

The bottom line: buy this book. It comes in handy during those inevitable awkward occasions when someone asks you what you do with your spare time, and you end up trying to explain the concept of 'zine networking in a couple of sentences (to paraphrase Doug Adams, this is, of course, impossible). Seventeen bucks ppd. (and well worth it) from Box 147, Stn. J, Toronto, Ontario M4J 4X8 Canada. Make out cheques to Mangajin Books.

P.S.: They're getting a new issue together, and are interested in submissions and feedback.

P.P.S.: Throw in an extra three dead Prime Ministers or so and ask for a set of "Media-tors", colourful Situationist-style stickers that say things like "Contains Disposable Reality – No Deposit No Return – A Tradition You Can Depend On," and "Save!! Tear Down This Ad & Bring It In For 50% Off!!" You can figure out what to do with them.

Notes Concerning The Departure of My Nervous System by Steve Venright ($8.00 from Contra Mundo Press, 552 Church St., Box 500-52, Toronto M4Y 2H0 Canada)

Published by the same people who do **Mental Radio** (an excellent quarterly 'zine of experimental writing and art, available for $3.00 per issue from the same address), **Notes** is high-density digital poetry for the '90s. The physical appearance of the book parodies that of a compact disc, complete with jewel box (the table of contents is found on the back cover, like the list of tracks found on an album; at the bottom of the page is a note reading "TO BE READ AT MAXIMUM VOLUME"). As a structural metaphor, this works wonderfully, because the feeling the prose poems generated in me is similar to the one I get after listening to *Coil*'s "Unreleased Themes for Hellraiser" CD too many times in a row. In **Factsheet Five** #41 (This is the new address: contact Hudson Luce at P.O. Box 8026, Atlanta, Georgia, USA. 30306-0026.), Mike Gunderloy called it the "crashing civilizations effect" (this rumination led me to provide, free of charge, the following marketing hint for up-and-coming industrial musicians: get Venright to do your liner notes).

Not to say that Venright lacks a sense of humour, but it's very disconcerting humour, in a William S. Burroughs kind of way. Take the following passage, from 'track' 1, "Induce Vomiting".

> *If protective seal has been broken do not attempt to move victim until all players have had a chance to roll. Game is over when a player on either team secretes a pungent glandular fluid through a slit near the left temple and begins to charge furiously at the nearest opponent.*

Like Burroughs, Venright slides out of the commonplace into the bizarre so quickly that it leaves the reader with a feeling of vertiginous uncertainty about what, exactly, the real **is**. These sorts of linguistic games draw attention to the writing **as** writing, and justifiably so, because this is top-notch work (Venright has another collection coming out with Contra Mundo later this year: I'm first in line).

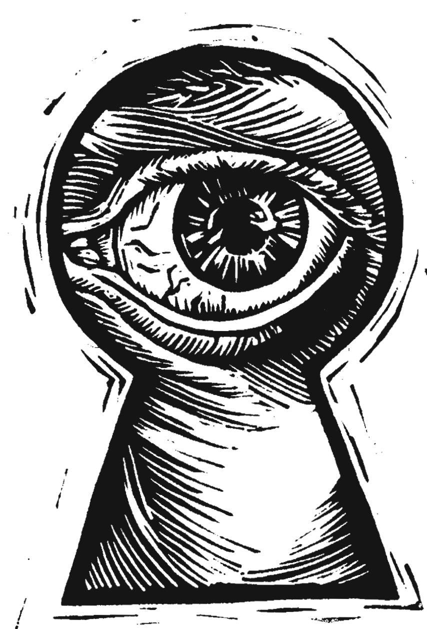
Even if you don't normally read poetry – **especially** if you don't normally read poetry – you should order this (quickly: the print run was two hundred copies). It'll renew your faith in an art form your high-school English teacher did his (or her) best to alienate you from for life.

—Darren Wershler-Henry

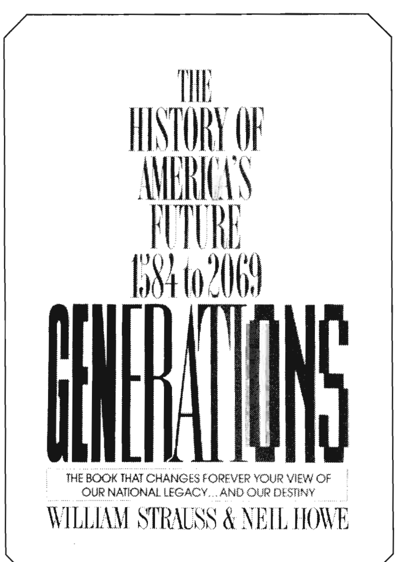
> "But if a general youth culture no longer exists, vibrant subcultures still do (e.g., the house nation, the hip hop nation, cyberpunk hackers, the virtual reality tribe, etc.). These subcultures are neither opposed to the parent culture nor in tune with it – just indifferent."
>
> —Frank Owen in **Spin**

Enslaved by the Reality Blur

> "You belong to it, too. You came along at the same time. You can't get away from it. You're a part of it whether you want to be or not." What is this "it" in Thomas Wolfe's dialogue in **You Can't Go Home Again**? His own 'Lost Generation'. To Wolfe, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Cowley, and other like-aged writers of the 1920s, membership in this generation reflected a variety of emotions and mannerisms: weary cynicism at a young age, risk-taking, bingelike behaviour, disdain for a pompous 'older generation'. Wolfe's peers stood across a wide divide from moralistic midlifers and across another divide from straight-arrow teenagers who had never known the lethal futility of trench warfare. To belong, you had to be combat-eligible during World War I and a rising adult when Prohibition started. No one formally defined it that way. You just knew. (Strauss & Howe, 1991, 58)



Sound familiar? The timing's different, but the song remains the same. The media usually calls us **twentysomethings**, if we're mentioned at all, (and of course it's a Baby Boomer spinoff label). We have other names too; lots of them: the most common being **Generation X** (from Coupland's best-selling novel), or **The Invisible Generation**, **The Over-the-Counter Culture**, **The Lost Generation Part 2**, **Transcybergnostics**, **The Jobless Generation**, **The Nowhere Generation**, **The Meme Generation**, **The Boomerang Generation**, **The No Generation**, **The Devolutionary Generation, The Great Observers**, **The Do-Nothing Generation**, **The Nihilistic Optimists**, **The Baby Busters**, **New Edge,** and more.



William Strauss and Neil Howe, the authors of the very fine book **Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069** coined the silliest term: **13ers**. That's a reference to our age group's position as the thirteenth generation in the United States, as well as a 'bad luck' generation. However, credit is due: the book helped frame my thoughts. The authors advance a solid theory based upon cyclical repeating patterns consisting of four distinct generational types. For example, our generation (**13ers**) is classified as Reactive, and our course parallels that of the original **Lost** (1883-1900), the **Gilded** (1822-1842), the **Liberty** (1724-1741) and the **Cavalier** generations (1615-1647) of U.S. history. **Generations** contains a powerful set of ideas that help illuminate our position in the North American infrastructure. A minor quibble: it's too United Statesian; Canadians **do** live outside of the U.S. Propaganda blanket.



Additionally, all generations seem to be composed of three basic personality types: Beliefists (Adopt a given social role. Family, Church, Military, Political, Environmentalist, etc.), Individuists (Adapt quickly to new circumstances and look out for number one. Industrialists, Criminals, Salesmen, Tree-planters, Sailors etc.), and Reactionists (Aware, but generally removed from the dominant culture, and able to choose to participate, or not. Artists, Mystics, Scholars, Poetic Terrorists, Monks, etc.). My discussion tends to focus on the last two groups.

Now that **Generation X** is a media lunch, it's interesting to see what's being said; perhaps it'll help **us** figure out who we are. Basically, we're talking about people born and raised in North America in the '60s. I think these observations are global to some extent, but North American culture and economics play large roles. The overqualified out-of-work yuppies take the entry level positions in the machine. We collect tips, post-secondary degrees and new jobs in retail, tending to stay away from organized religion and politics, unless there's a chance to get that elusive 'good job'. I also assume that these people aren't going to "grow up" overnight and get that house in the suburbs either. People stick to the pattern they're in at twenty-five. A sense of humour is vital.

The portrait that emerges of the 1961-1964 cohort-group is vivid and unflattering. Over the postwar period, at each age through 24, this group has generated all of America's lowest aptitude-test scores; the highest high school senior drug and alcohol abuse; all but one of America's highest drunk driving rates; and most of America's highest rates for three violent crimes. Very likely (though detailed age-

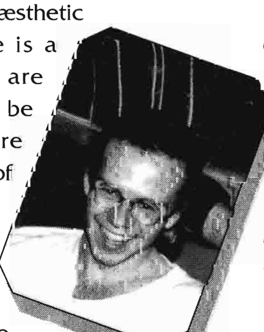
the "twentysomething" Program



bracketed data remain unavailable), it has also generated record rates for many other social pathologies, including suicide …

By 1991, the men and women born from 1961 through 1964 have reached their late twenties. They are no longer taking aptitude tests and have left their high-crime and high-drinking ages behind them. We would be naive, however, to assume that the collective personality of these individuals will simply disappear as they grow older. Plainly, America is dealing with a troubled group. (Strauss & Howe, 1991, 52)

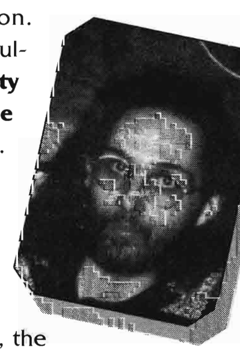
Membership in **Generation X** isn't based solely on physical age, jobs in the service industry, criminal tendencies, or our childhood television environment, rather it's a common set of æsthetic responses. Attitude is a survival skill. What are usually perceived to be common interests are really a common set of coping mechanisms developed to help us function in the environment we find ourselves in. We Tune In, Turn Off, Drop Out (or some combination of the above) and laugh.



Our style is assimilation, our attitude reaction, even if some visceral rebelliousness remains. While 'thirtysomething' has become high concept, twentysomething lacks coherence: We are clueless yet wizened. Too unopinionated to voice concern, purposefully enigmatic and indecisive. We are basically unshockable. (Ellis, 1991, 68)

The ability to manipulate symbols is our primary strength, and in concert with our terminal cynicism, we have the skills required to negotiate the shifting layers of meaning produced by media (our social-reality creator). Saddam Hussein is our friend in the Middle East. The U.S.S.R. is an unstoppable evil empire. The President headed the C.I.A. Bhophal. Crop Circles. Chernobyl. Woodstock. We see the bullshit we live in.

Adding to the post-modern confusion, we live outside History. It's all at our fingertips, and we aren't particularly attached to any of it. God knows how many times I've seen that single bullet take off Kennedy's head, an event that occurred before my conception. 1992 is the nexus of human cultural activity. **We have the ability to access all information while keeping our eyes wide open**. Bring on the pornography and hate propaganda. Let no meme escape a critical gaze and a side-order of laughter (heavy on the irony, black like pitch). When awful shit is funny, the events **can** be assimilated. We're aware of the issues our species must face, if it's to survive. We actually think about the population explosion, global famine, AIDS, the Greenhouse Effect, the ozone layer, the rapid extinction of plant and animal species, the environmental catastrophe that was the Persian Gulf, and the total absurdity of the current socio-political global-wealth distribution system. But we can't be bothered to protest in the streets, that's an obsolete gesture best left to people who want to change the **really** important issues, like strippers, taxes, and the latest politically correct bandwagon. Something happened that turned the world into an entertainment war. Life is an endless series of commercials vying for our attention. "Difficult to document because of its fragmented nature, the twentysomething generation is an impossible object. In other words it doesn't exist, except in the mind's eye of the media." (Owen, 1991, 68)



What do people born in the '60s have in common? First, we define ourselves in the negative: we know what we're not. We aren't Baby Boomers or Nintendo/computer babies. That's all we can be sure of, since **we're a collection of subcultures**. But we all enjoy pissing and moaning about Yuppies, the doddering self-absorbed consumption machines. If you bring a robust Chianti, I'll bring the fava beans. Speaking of Yuppies, **Esquire** says:

The Sixties refrain went: If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem. The people who mouthed that slogan are clearly part of the problem.

That leaves changing the system to a group of people who are believed to be uniquely unprepared for the task. This generation, now roughly between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five, is not really a generation at all. It's an interregnum between the generation that came of age in the Sixties and the kids for whom the Sixties are just an Oliver Stone movie. Curiously enough, this faceless, colorless, odorless transitional group – too young for Vietnam, too old for the Gulf – is the largest collection of people ever born in this country (1957 was the peak), considerably larger than that of the thirty-five to forty-five year-olds who claim to hold the patent on the Baby Boom.

To the Sixties generation, which now dominates the upper echelons of the American media, practically everything that followed was more boring, less vital, and just a little bit hollow: the young and the ruthless. It galled them to see twenty-seven-year-old investment bankers become millionaires at an age



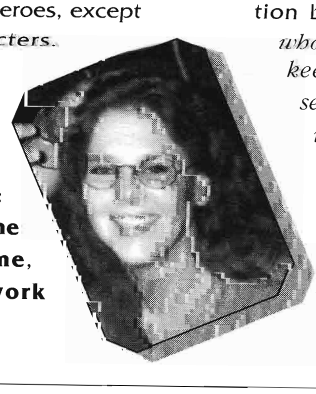
when they were still at the pottery wheel.

As a practical matter, that impression of youthful affluence didn't reflect reality. The red-suspenders crowd made good copy but represented only a tiny percentage of their age group. The tail end of the baby boom – born in the late Fifties and early Sixties – was actually poorer and facing fewer options than those who blamed them for not being more spontaneous. Thousands still lived with their parents ... the real story of the age group is thwarted ambition.

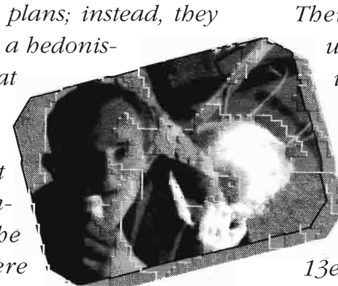
This Nowhere generation, which came of age in the Seventies, is like an overweight, confused middle sibling. It was okay that the firstborn brothers and sisters had all the fun; their table scraps of music and cool were an inspiration, or at least better than anything happening in the Seventies. They raised the right questions and cautioned against selling out. For the more sensitive, this provided a needed stutter step on the road to business school. (Alter, 1991, 99–100)

I don't agree with Alter's age categories; there's a big difference between a 25-year-old and a 35-year-old, but some of his ideas are interesting. Particularly if we don't change substantially as we 'grow up' and our attitudes **are** fully developed now. "Rising 13ers will sense they will never gain much collective esteem from others. Americans who look upon 25-year-olds as a wasted bunch will, a decade from now, look upon 35-year-olds in much the same way." (Strauss & Howe, 1991, 412)

But we recycle, and most of us are (in practice, if not philosophy) 'politically correct'. We don't have any heroes, except for a few cartoon characters. Not many of us are married, although a few have children. We also tend to have extreme taste in art; usually movies and music: (films like **Bladerunner**, **The Wicker Man**, **Videodrome**, **Bad Taste**, **A Clockwork Orange**, **Santa Sangre**, **Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer**, **Suspiria**, **Dawn of the Dead**, and now David Cronenberg's **Naked Lunch**: musicians like **Frank Zappa**, **Kate Bush**, **Iggy Pop**, **Stan Ridgway**, **The Pixies**, **Bongwater**, **Coil**, **Sonic Youth**, **Gwar**, **Jane's Addiction**, and the absolutely brilliant **Butthole Surfers.** We occasionally find time to read fiction by authors like Hunter S. Thompson, William Gibson, Kurt Vonnegut, Clive Barker, Tom Robbins, Thomas Pynchon, K.W. Jeter, and Bret Easton Ellis, or just go for an espresso and trance out to industrial-disco-acidhouse at the local club. We may have cultivated an interest in computers, occultism, hard science, and/or creative neurochemistry. We like monsters, images of the fantastic and, of course, **The Simpsons** and **The Far Side**.



Once alienation sets in, 13ers will accentuate behavior patterns that today strike older generations as frenetic, soulless, and physically shocking – confirming elder judgements that this truly is a "wasted" generation. They will then put their own stamp on the American mood. There will be no mass movements or organized plans; instead, they will burst forth with a hedonistic cross-culture that will look, taste, smell, sound, and feel anti-Boom. It will be defiantly noncerebral, probing the physical devil where the like-aged Boom once probed the spiritual sublime, seeking pleasure where next elders once sought beatitude, evoking the black prankishness of Halloween where the hippie culture once evoked the image of a spring rainbow. Young novelists, filmmakers, songwriters, and columnists will produce works that will seem interesting if puzzling to the aging Silent [the generation born between 1925 and 1942], *wholly inarticulate to Boomers, and keenly expressive to 13ers themselves. This clash of jaundiced rising adults with righteous midlifers will resemble the 1920s – not the 1960s."* (Strauss & Howe, 1991, 410)



We thrive on paradox and tend toward apathy. We do things for ourselves (even altruistic work is done because it's personally satisfying). Yet, we go out of our way to help our friends and roommates. We usually share our wealth with our group. We're paranoid, because it's a wonderful way to consider every possibility, no matter how bizarre, and it creates interesting stories to tell our friends. And consciously or not, we use chaos theory to help make sense of the information pollution we live in. **But we really want to travel and get jobs waiting tables in other countries.**

Claire and Elvissa share a common denominator – both are headstrong, both have a healthy curiosity, but most important, both left their old lives behind them and set forth to make new lives for themselves in the name of adventure. In their similar quest to find a personal truth, they willingly put themselves on the margins of society, and this, I think, took some guts. It's harder for women to do this than men. (Coupland, 1991, 88)

We develop ways to be invisible, if we want to be. **Xers** are social chameleons.

Their greatest skills will go relatively unnoticed: the capacity to observe, to identify unmet needs, to be "smooth" and conceal feelings when necessary, to move quickly when the moment is right, and to make sure whatever people try does in fact work as intended. Likewise 13ers will come to believe that the best way to win individually is by taking incredible risks. They will figure that those who play by the (mostly Boom) rules probably won't get anywhere – so why play by the rules?" (Strauss & Howe, 1991, 413)

We've adjusted to varying degrees of poverty, therefore our expectations are usually reasonable and realistic (until I win the lottery). Most can't afford to buy a house, and lots of us still live in our parents' basements (when we aren't travelling with a backpack).

The international marketplace will provide this generation with its most promising economic frontier – and a way to take advantage of its underappreciated linguistic and computer skills. At times, young entrepreneurs will engage in global business activities their elders will look upon as piratical,



opportunist, even traitorous. Many will seek their fortune in the service of America's creditors, helping them purchase, manage, or liquidate American assets. Lucrative opportunities may arise in nations with fledgling capitalist economies – in enterprises like fast food, fashion, and entertainment. (Strauss & Howe, 1991, 411)

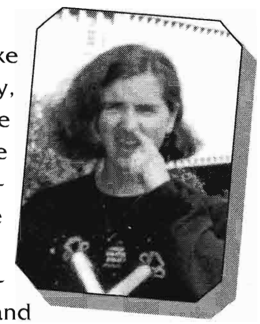
The traditional 'steady' well paying jobs have shut down for us. Government and Corporate jobs for people our age are very rare, because there are so many highly qualified unemployed yuppies. They've locked us out of the system, possibly until their children are old enough to take the reins. Recessions strike the young. We take what we can get.

Their career paths will take on a kinetic frenzy. Thirty-year-olds will jump at opportunities their elders will find inconsequential and take on long odds their elders will find incomprehensible. Their greatest successes will come in small businesses that outhustle and (thanks to low wages and benefits) underprice elder-dominated rivals. The U.S. Postal Service may well come under ruinous attack from new enterprises run by piece-rate 13ers who – as veteran bicycle messengers, delivery drivers, and computer hackers – will know how to move information more cheaply and reliably than tenured civil servants. (Strauss & Howe, 1991, 413)

The pragmatism forged by this societal adversity is very positive though. We'll use any tools available to accomplish the goals we feel are important, like the environment, or an artwork, (and our creations are, by necessity, quite cost-efficient).

Another developmental factor is the unsupervised media environment we grew up in; we are global village TV/movie kids raised in HyperCulture [Sampled/Cut-Up bits and bytes]. Our nostalgia is for TV shows, not time periods. Thankfully our brains adapted to chaotic over-stimulation. We **can** handle vast quantities of information, if we choose to pay attention to it. Some wander in the woods and some become stimulus-addicts. So it goes.

The thirtysomethingers talk about postmodernism (after all, so many of them are media workers), but the twentysomethingers inhabit the space of postmodernism, as they have done all their lives. They are the first generation unable to remember a time before postmodernism. They are the first generation to be totally socialized by the media. (Owen, 1991, 68)



So, we do have some weird skills, like extremely critical observation. Ironically, this means we can never be sure if we're being deceived. We tend to believe everything and/or nothing. This informational Union of Opposites is a strange link to Gnostic cosmology, made explicit in an article by Erik Davis. He examines Gnosticism, Information Theory and the work of SF philosopher Philip K. Dick:

The Gnostics' negation of the body and their disbelief of sensual data prepare us for a world of media events and simulation. Their logos is information, their pneuma the immanence of the high-tech mind, their archons are the ideological and capitalist powers of the post-industrial global economy. Their paranoia is ours, and their weapons should be, too. We must fashion an agonistic spiritual postmodernism, a guerilla ontology in the age of hypermedia. (Davis, 1990, 39)

Wow! Let's do that!



Seriously though, where **will** we be in twenty years, if there's still a world left? Are we destined to turn into Yuppie-like creatures, or are we permanently disenfranchised from positions of power in government and business? There's no answer yet. We have to figure out where we are to control where we go.

Two sets of questions will haunt their rising adulthood. First, will their elders learn to appreciate that this generation does indeed offer a pragmatic sensibility that America will find important, even essential, in the decades ahead? Will Boomers come to realize that the 13ers' very different childhood environment has endowed them with valuable antidotes to the Boom's own worst tendencies – or will Boomers continue to look upon them not just as juniors, but as inferiors? The answers to those questions will affect the depth of the 13er alienation and the surliness of this forthcoming generational clash.

The second set of questions has more to do with the 13ers themselves. By the spin of the cycle, whatever phase of life they happen to occupy will be (as it has already been) tempest-tossed, laden with perhaps the wrong kind of adventure for people their age. Over four centuries, Reactive generations have been assigned the thankless job of yanking American history back on a stable course – and afterward have gotten few rewards for their sacrifices. Will this realization prompt 13ers to burn out young – or will it harden a gritty self confidence around an important generational mission? As America's most perceptive living generation, 13ers can recognize a few crucial facts of life that Boomers will not – for example, that without a little "bad" pragmatism, even the most noble dreams will never get off the ground. More to the point: without a few black sheep to slow the shepherd, those aging Boomers might do something really crazy. (Strauss & Howe, 1991, 414)

—Bruce Fletcher

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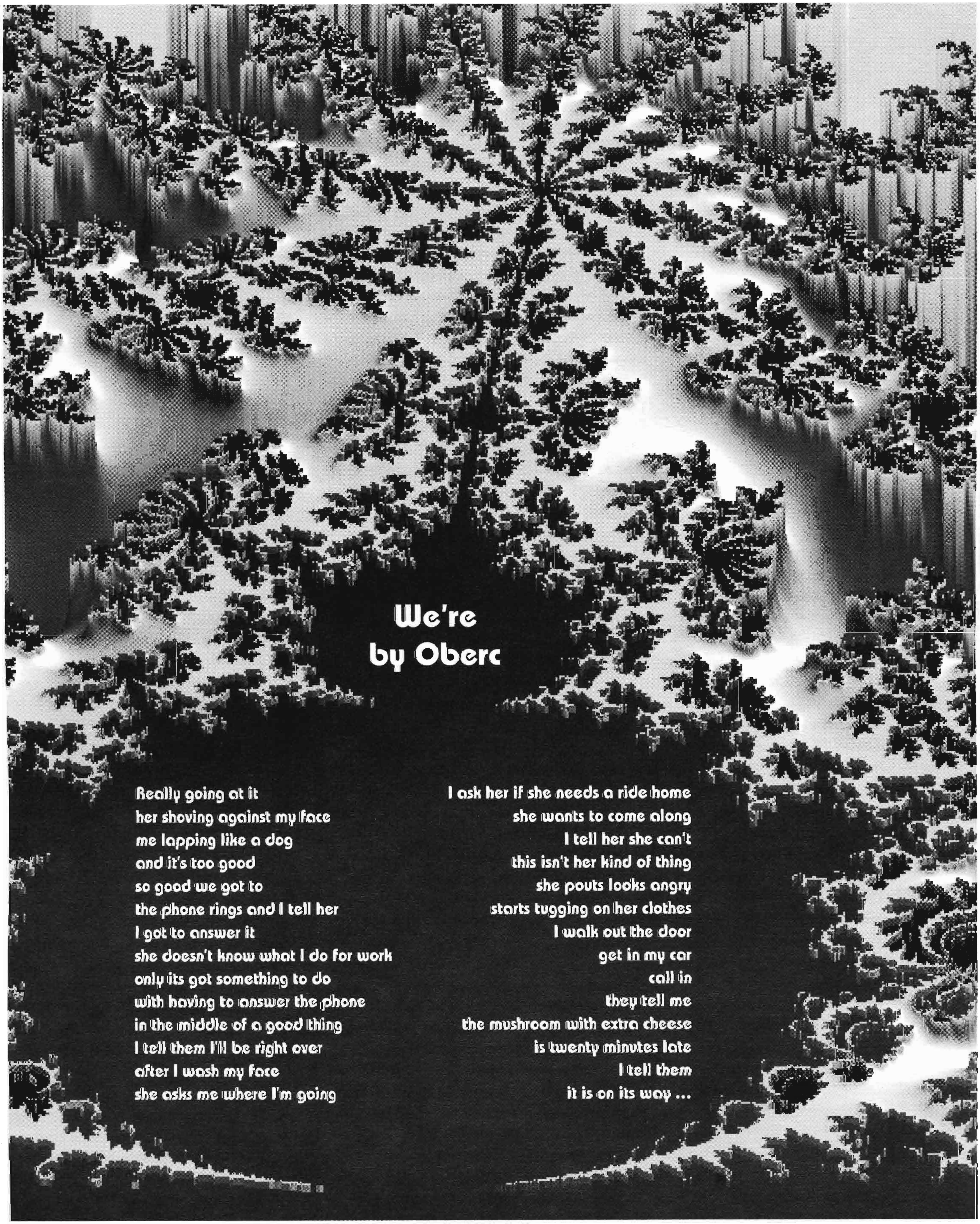
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We're
by Oberc

Really going at it
her shoving against my face
me lapping like a dog
and it's too good
so good we got to
the phone rings and I tell her
I got to answer it
she doesn't know what I do for work
only its got something to do
with having to answer the phone
in the middle of a good thing
I tell them I'll be right over
after I wash my face
she asks me where I'm going

I ask her if she needs a ride home
she wants to come along
I tell her she can't
this isn't her kind of thing
she pouts looks angry
starts tugging on her clothes
I walk out the door
get in my car
call in
they tell me
the mushroom with extra cheese
is twenty minutes late
I tell them
it is on its way ...

Strangled by an Intestine

(In which our intrepid reporter plays Q & A with the "Dark, Slavic, Cramped and Sensuous"[1] Guy Maddin)

FIT THE FIRST

(Being a general Prolegomenon to the Work of Mr. Guy Maddin, Filmmaker, and to ***ARCHANGEL****, his latest Origination)*

I'm getting a little tired of every film critic east of Kenora trying to explain Guy Maddin and his movies by talking about what a weird place Winnipeg is. If anything, the opposite is true: Winnipeg is very normal. Hyper-normal, in fact. I ought to know; I lived there for almost all of my life. Many major corporations use it as a test market (yup, we had McRib™ before you did) because it's such an absurdly perfectly normal cross-section of middle America (and I'm using that term in the continental sense, so don't get snarly, you nationalists) that it's ... well ...

Okay. So Winnipeg **is** strange, but only because it's **too** normal (and concomitantly, because its population is continually bombarded with the most crass examples of mass-media hucksterism ever contrived by man or beast). And therein lie (I think) a few hints about Guy Maddin and his movies, which also include the short film **The Dead Father**, and his first feature **Tales from the Gimli Hospital**.

To look at him (he used to be a bank teller), you wouldn't know he was capable of creating a film where one character proves his heroism by strangling a marauding Bolshevik with his own spilt guts. To avoid the possibility that any of his viewers might miss the subtler nuances of the scene, Maddin thoughtfully follows it up with a title card which reads "Strangled By An Intestine." I'm beginning to think that people follow the same rules of protective colouration that function in the animal world: it's the smart, innocuous-looking ones that you have to worry about.



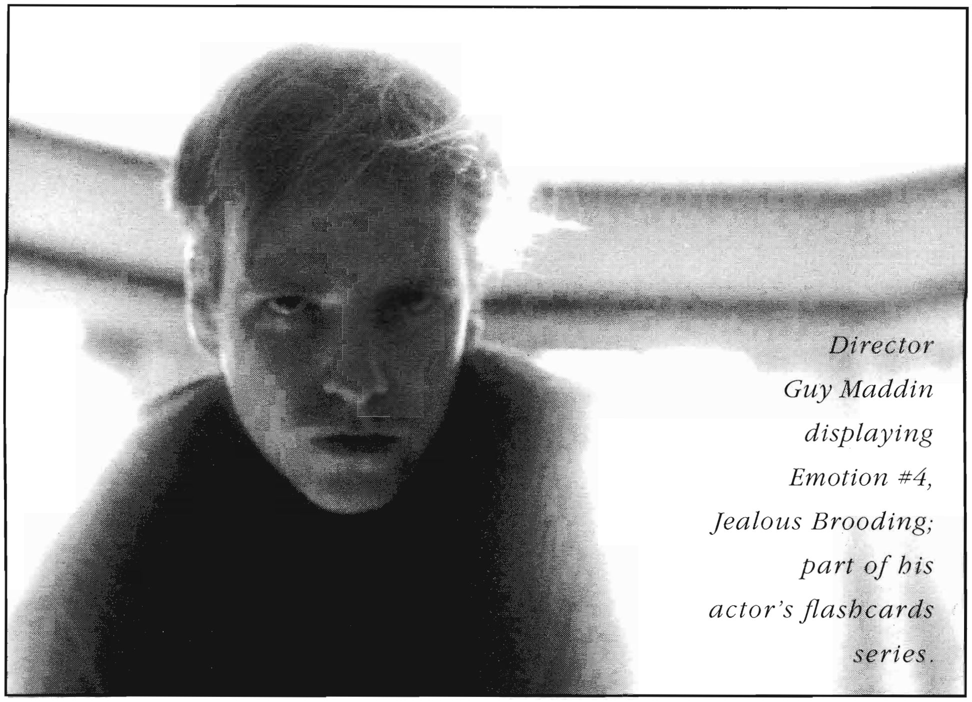
What made Guy Maddin's mind into the strange and wonderful movie-making device it is today is obvious, given the above information about the nature of Winnipeg: he got media-bombed. It seems to have started at birth, when (rumour has it) his brother named him after B-grade matinee idol Guy Madison. He cites his major influence as distant late-night radio stations, fading in and out of audibility. This is a man who watched too many **I Love Lucy** reruns.

His latest film, **Archangel**, is a chronicle of World War I like you've never seen it.[2] But that's just the point: neither did Maddin (he's only 34). The Russia he portrays is a conglomeration of bits and pieces – which may or may not bear any resemblance to the truth, but there's no way of knowing, so why bother making the distinction? – culled from various and sundry technologies of information storage and retrieval (my dad says they used to call them books and newsreels). The result is not only far more entertaining (and less expensive) than the original production, but what it tells us about the way mass-media propaganda works may also be of more use than a straight narrative could be, or will ever be again. When you watch **Archangel**, try to think simultaneously about the way Operation George Bush's Manhood was packaged for the first war with a logo.

The set of coincidences which led to my chance to speak with Guy Maddin is too strange to relate here (actually, it was pretty mundane, but you don't want to know that). I'll just mention that he generously agreed to answer a handful of questions from a scruffy prairie boy he'd never heard of when I accosted him at the Toronto premiere of **Archangel**, and was committed enough to the process to do so from the El Rey Inn in New Mexico (I've got the letter on the hotel stationery to prove it), and to subsequently provide us with a whole whack of really neat photos, which accompany the piece you are reading at this very moment. (Note: Sorry about that. I just had an urge to have the longest sentence in the magazine in one of my articles. I think I win). *[Sorry, you lose <see p. 63> – Bruce]*

The only thing I forgot to ask him is what a Key Grip **really** does.

(Here ends the Prolegomenon and Begin the Questions)



Director Guy Maddin displaying Emotion #4, Jealous Brooding; part of his actor's flashcards series.

FIT THE SECOND

(Being the Questions)

Q: In Toronto, you mentioned that some of the actors in **Archangel** performed under hypnosis. Who were you referring to specifically, and in what scene? What was the rationale (if there was one) for doing this?

A: There's a scene early in the movie, after little Geza has been horse-brushed back to consciousness, where his family and Lt. Boles sit upon the boy's sick-bed and discuss the healing powers of horsehair. **All** the actors were hypnotized for this scene. I wanted the actors to be doves, not only for this scene but for most of the movie. I wanted them to speak in a low measured cooing, and relate to each other as peaceful birds. This was something they could easily do, but when (fellow actor) Michael O'Sullivan offered to put them under and **suggest** birds, I thought it was a great opportunity. The stuff that didn't make it into the final cut was pretty strange, but why film a Reveen show? In the movie's final scene, the homecoming parade, Kyle is right out of it. He insisted upon the post-hypnotic suggestion of complete forgetfulness and actually has **no** recollection of shooting the scene! What a dedicated amnesiac! I know I'm not the first director to hypnotize his or her actors, but I may be the first to do it for no apparent reason.

Q: There is a certain mythology surrounding the number 23 that seems to have appeared first in the texts of William S. Burroughs, although it's spread far and wide since then. The following excerpt is from Robert Anton Wilson's **Cosmic Trigger**:

> *Burroughs began keeping records of odd coincidences. To his astonishment, 23s appeared in a lot of them. When he told me about this, I began keeping my own records and 23s appeared in many of them. (Readers of Koestler's Challenge of Chance will find that there are a great many 23s in that encyclopedia of odd coincidences also).*
>
> *This, of course, illustrates Jano Watts' concept of "The Net" the lines of coincidence-synchronicity that connect everything-with-everything.* (p.44)

Were you aware of any of this when you put a large number 23 on Philbin's flight helmet? If not, what do you think about the concept of synchronicity in general (it seems to be a major structural device in **Archangel** – Iris's urn and the near-identical bottle that appears later, the wooden leg that fits Boles perfectly, the parallel scenes where Boles follows the map, etc.) and 'the 23 syndrome' in particular?

A: Philbin's helmet was actually fashioned from a batting helmet that art director Jeff Solylo filched from a Detroit Tigers warm-up a few years ago. Jeff kept the number intact from this coif's previous incarnation as a tribute to its original owner, a player by the name of Kirk Gibson, I think (you'd have to look up his uniform number in an old Tigers program). What this says about synchronicity I don't know.

I **do** know that [script collaborator] George Toles and I believe an object or piece of music acquires emotional force when it is repeated, and remembered, in a different context (the ending of **It's a Wonderful Life** is a good example of how this works). In **Archangel**, Veronkha reminds one of the lost Iris. A wooden leg reminds one of the lost original. Bottles are confused with urns. Think about what synchronicity does: first, it jangles the memory, then it blurs or even anæsthetizes it. Synchronicity often occasions deep emotions, but if the emotions are too painful, a concomitant psychic anæsthetic – forgetfulness – erases the coincidence. Without a proper memory, a comfy helplessness results. In the trenches of **Archangel**, hearts wounded by they-can't-remember-what lie toasty warm beneath a fluffy white blanket of forgetfulness. For the movie, we constructed this gentle emotional landscape by piling all the snow on top of the synchronicities. I know this gentleness disappointed our more bloodthirsty viewers, but I think war movies can be too scary sometimes.

Maybe someone can tell me why Jeff took Kirk Gibson's helmet and not Lou Whitaker's.

Q: While we're on the topic of synchronicity, there were startling parallels between the way you present war in **Archangel** and the war we watched unfolding in the Persian Gulf around the time of your movie's release (I'm thinking specifically about two things here: one – the role that chemical weapons played in both the war and in your film; two – the construction by both the media and your film of the image of an enemy filled with what you call "self-love" – Saddam Hussein on the one hand, and your Huns and Bolsheviks on the other). How did the onset of a real war affect the reception of your film?

A: I watched the events in the Persian Gulf unfold with a feeling of horror – horror at being scooped. It was our intention all along to present our war in terms of propaganda – the charmingly naïve propaganda used by the Allied press during World War I. These anachronistic slanders, which depicted the pre-Nazi Kaiser Wilhelm II as

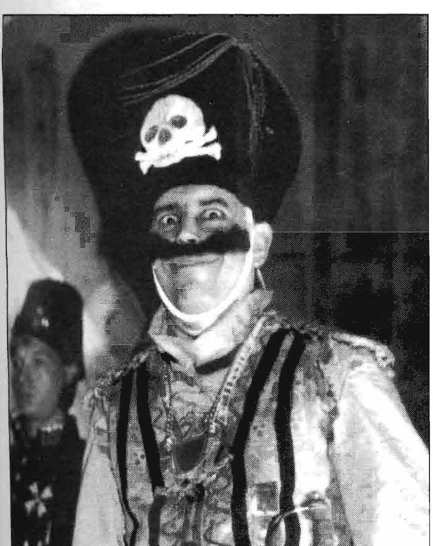
a boy-ripping imp of Satan and enemy of Christendom and civilization, have always reminded me of the way I malign my own romantic rivals and enemies. This stuff was going to be at least gently funny, but then Saddam Hussein burst onto the scene. His routine went off the map. He got all the laughs and our prescience went unrewarded.

At least our chemical weapons were nicer; we used them as the benign agents of the above-mentioned forgetfulness. If only Saddam could use his nerve gas for Good, instead of Evil.

Q: There's a scene in **Archangel** where the camera spirals down a long tube into Boles' ear that reminded me of the famous scene in **Blue Velvet**. From the clippings I've seen, many critics compare your work with David Lynch (especially **Eraserhead**), yet I've heard that you don't think it's an apt comparison. I'd like to know what you think about the relationship (or lack thereof) your work bears to Lynch's. While I'm at it, who/what do you consider to be your major influences?

A: Well, you're right. Lynch's name comes up quite often, but I've noticed the term 'Lynch-like' is being used to describe everything not in the mainstream, and half the things **in** the mainstream as well! The term has a definition so flaccid as to be useless. Surely, like **Eraserhead**, my movies have been shot in black-and-white; have curious soundtracks; have 'bizarre' things in them; and, most importantly, have their origins in the screenwriter's personal experiences. However, I think Lynch and I are headed in opposite directions,





especially in this last area. As far as I can tell, **Wild at Heart** is about nothing. I hope Lynch hasn't run out of things inside. Maybe he just isn't looking there anymore because the mass audience he has cultivated couldn't care less about what's inside. I'm a pretty hollow person myself but I do try to anchor everything in the movies to what little is left inside myself. I know Toles feels the same way.

Also, Lynch keeps turning up the volume; everything's getting bigger and stranger. I think a viewer needs a gentle and quiet setting in which to dream. At least that's what my press kit says.

Maybe this is the right time to deliver my rant on soundtracks. it goes like this:

GUY MADDIN'S RANT ON SOUNDTRACKS

When a painter starts a canvas, he or she can use any kind of brush-stroke desired; they can even throw the paint on with their hands. When a poet puts pen to paper he or she can use any word in any language, or even make one up, **but: when a filmmaker adds the soundtrack to his or her movie, it had better be the same kind of soundtrack as all the other movies, or else!** Why is it that there is only one kind of movie sound – 'realistic sound' – and that everything that deviates from this is considered 'bad sound'? Why can't sound be slashed and pasted like a crude, but beautiful collage? Why must sounds obey the laws of perspective? I kind of like it when the lips don't quite synch up with the dialogue. It reminds me of when children crayon over the lines in a colouring book. **Why are you people so anal about your children's colouring books?**

THE END OF GUY MADDIN'S RANT ON SOUNDTRACKS

To be anal about your question, I owe you a few thoughts on major influences. This is where Peter Greenaway would start listing painters. House painters I say! My influences have been radio stations – very distant radio stations that drift in and out of broadcast clarity on late summer nights. The thick acoustic textures of static mixed with music and spoken word have created for me, since early childhood, worlds far more magical and mysterious than those found on all the calendars hanging in Peter Greenaway's kitchen.

Q: What's the story on that machine-thingy that Boles keeps crawling out from under?

A: It's an electric sodomizer.

Q: To what extent does your present æsthetic derive from your involvement with others in the Winnipeg Film Group (John Paizs in particular)? Do you think your work is in any way uniquely 'Winnipeggian', or is it really similar to trends elsewhere, and just characterized as strange because Toronto and New York film critics can't believe anything good could come out of Winnipeg?

Supplementary Question: Bruce has a theory about what he calls "the new tribalism", which more or less boils down to the idea that small communities of people with common tastes have the potential to

become primary socio-media units in the '90s. He asked me to see how you thought this idea applied to the Winnipeg Film Group, so that's what I'm doing right now.
A: I'm afraid I don't buy the "new tribalism" theory, noble wish that it is. Nor do I think there's much that is uniquely 'Winnipeggian' about my stuff. It's something that's in the air everywhere, if you look for it. Paizs has always been a huge inspiration for me, but other than a shared revulsion for bathos, our 'æsthetics' have little in common. Well, maybe we both like looking back, back to the time when fairy tales were true, back to the times that are lost, gone, gone forever, or something like that. I don't know. Don't ask me that.
Q: I read somewhere that you'd like to hand-tint every frame in a future film. Could you tell me more about that project?
A: I'm shooting our next film, **Careful** (to be released later this year), in something I like to think of as 'repressed Technicolor'. Hand-tinting every frame would take two trillion person-hours, so I've had to scrap that plan. At one point I had decided to computer colourize the movie, but even though broadcasters everywhere are eager to paint colours on top of timeless black-and-white masterpieces in order to broaden their audience base, it was considered blasphemy (or at least ridiculous) for a director to do it to his own work. Telefilm refused to finance such a caprice. These days, no one outside of the Arts Councils will fund a black-and-white movie in Canada, so it's Canadian Colour or nothing from here on in, but that's okay. I think all Canadian movies **should** look alike; it's kind of like a team uniform. I'm going to tinker with the colour a bit, as a baseball player who cuts his stirrup socks up a bit higher than the other fellows on his team might, but my stuff will be as Canadian as everyone else's from around here, thank you sir.
Q: Archangel is a winter film, but it's shot indoors. Why not go outside, since Winnipeg's buried in snow for a good chunk of the year?
A: It's too cold to shoot outside in the winter. I once worked on an outdoor winter shoot. We stood around all day growing great big beards of ice. Fake snow is better. It's cleaner, too. No dogs.
Q: Finally: Is there anything you'd like to add – pet peeves with critical reception of your work, sweeping polemical statements, laurels to hand out, etc.?
A: Most critics have been very generous with my movies, no matter how uneven they have been. Telefilm, MAC, Canada Council, and especially Cinephile have also been incredibly supportive of me. This may sound like the acceptance speech for an award I'll never get, but I honestly and truly feel very lucky to be working on these movies. Most people don't know what to make of the stuff, but at least half of these people are polite enough not to complain to me.
THE END

—Darren Wershler-Henry

This interview has been an A.D.o.S.A.™ production. Special thanks to Guy Maddin.

Notes

1 – This is Peter Goddard's (of the **Toronto Star**) description ("Prairie Director Sees World in Black and White", Sat. 26 Jan. 1990) of Maddin and his work. It's not my fault, Guy. Really.

2 – There's no point in doing a plot summary here because it's too convoluted and there's no point in providing a list of all the weird stuff in the movie because weirdness is relative. Just go and see it. Trust me.



This photo is either OMP (Ordnance Motion Pictures) Orchestra recording score for Archangel in January 1990
or
"Prairie Schooner" Broadcast at CKY Studio, Winnipeg (sometime before the birth of Guy Maddin)

The Difference Engine

by William Gibson and Bruce Sterling
London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1990, 383 pp.

Note: *This review is based on two premises: that (one)* ***The Difference Engine*** *is a very good book, and (two) our readership being what it is, you're going to read it regardless of what I say. Therefore, rather than waste my time encouraging the inevitable, I've chosen to concentrate my efforts on pointing out a couple of things you might want to consider while perusing its pages.*

The Difference Engine is pretty much what Gibson said it would be in **Virus 23** #0 – a nineteenth century alternate history novel, "infinitely grimmer than **Neuromancer**" (p. 32). All the cyberspace cheerleaders that have been running around for the last eight years are testimony to the fact that the Sprawl looks like a **fun** place to be; the London Gibson and Sterling describe in **TDE** is big-time ugly. Why the change?

It's a truism of SF in general that it tends to be more about the present than any possible future. **The Difference Engine** is the textual equivalent of a computer model like Maxis Software's **SimCity** – it allows Gibson and Sterling to examine, under controlled circumstances, the human costs extracted by a computerized bureaucracy. Accordingly, it's possible to read the book not only as straight alternate-world SF, but also (and more interestingly) as a treatise on the laws of an information-based economy. For example, consider the following statements:

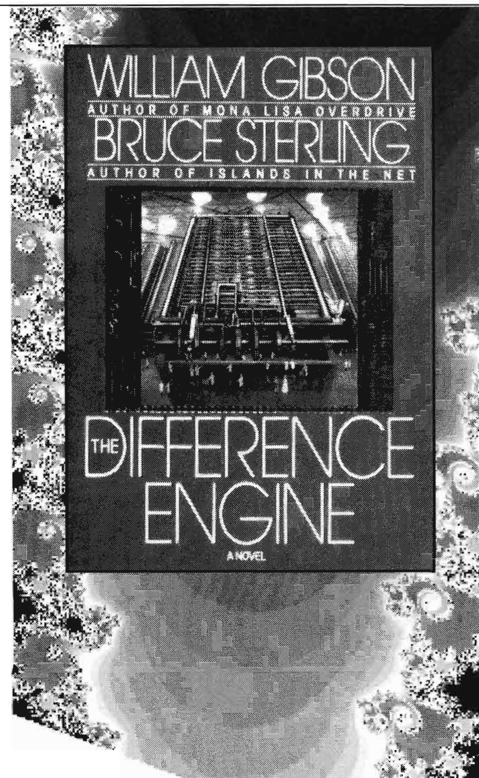
"It's what a cove knows that counts, ain't it, Sybil? More than land or money, more than birth. Information. Very flash." (p.13)

"'Says he'll give me back my [computer punch-] cards, as soon as he's had 'em copied. That way I don't lose nothin', you see?'

"Sybil felt dazed ... But isn't that stealing, somehow?'" (p.57)

"There is [in the headlines on Engine-driven billboards] *a wicked pretence that one has been informed. But no such thing has truly occurred! A mere slogan, an empty litany. No arguments are heard, no evidence is weighed. It isn't news at all, only a source of amusement for idlers."* (p.187)

As Michel Foucault has pointed out,



knowledge/information **is** power. The dissemination of information can result in a democratic general increase in power, but it can also strip the rights of the individual who created the information in the first place. Bootlegging software has implications that can affect real people, whether or not we choose to ignore them; so does the proliferation of tabloid TV shows. **The Difference Engine** shoves things like this in the reader's face, in an attempt to illustrate that the price we pay for building cyberspace may be far higher than most of the Silicon Valley/Media Lab types are willing to let on (see R. Karraker's "Highways of the Mind" in **Whole Earth Review** #70 for a look at some of the political realities that even the most hermetic hackers are going to have to start facing pretty soon).

This is not a reactionary stance on my part. The whole point of "cyberpunk" was to say, Look: we're so awash with information controlled by other people that we're in danger of disappearing into it:

As for that downloading stuff, I think those guys who seriously consider it are crazier than a sackful of rats. I think that's monstrous! It just seems so obvious to me, but people like those guys at Autodesk who're building cyberspace – I can't believe it; they've almost got it – they just don't understand. My hunch is that I was trying to come up with some kind of metaphor that would express my deepest ambivalence about media in the twentieth century. And it was my satisfaction that I sort of managed to do it, and then these boffins come in and say, "God damn, that's a good idea! Let's plug it all in!" But, you know, it just leaves me thinking, "What??" —William Gibson, in **Virus 23** #0 (p.30).

Perhaps **The Difference Engine** is "infinitely grimmer" than cyberpunk because we got so caught up in the fun, excessive parts of the latter that we couldn't really see its grimmer aspects. Looking back on it now, lots of things in the '80s worked off sheer excess (Reaganomics, Donald Trump, Garth Drabinsky, *Jim & Tammy, Live Aid ...); the* rapidity with which everything became totally fucked up in the '90s was nature's way of handing us the bill. **The Difference Engine** is the waiter's signature at the bottom, that's all.

Neo-conservatives take note: there's no safety in an attempt to retreat to a simpler past, either. Nature no longer works in the ordered way we used to believe it did (that's why literary Romanticism never happens in **TDE**). The world's fundamental unpredictability is represented by the presence of chaos theory in the book (think of another kind of computer modelling: Mandelbrot generators), the most obvious example being the "iterations" (or feedback loops – the basic mechanism of self-awareness that makes AI possible) into which the book is divided. There are more subtle manifestations of inherent disorderliness as well, such as Lady Ada Lovelace's formulation of what is known in our world as Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem: "any formal system must be both **incomplete** and **unable to establish its own consistency**" (p. 376). The future may not look all that rosy, but then you realize that even the most hoary tried-and-truisms may suddenly turn on you. So, there's no going back to Kansas (or the nineteenth century, or even the '50s) anymore.

As I said earlier, you're going to read this book anyway. When you do, make sure you do so in more than a cursory fashion, because it has a lot to offer. And whatever you do, don't call it "steampunk".

—DWH

Regionalism, Wave Pools and God

A Conversation with Rose McDowall and Robert Lee



Rose McDowall has a vibrant personality, is a pleasure to be with, and possesses an unmistakable, haunting voice, so it's no surprise to find that she's an active collaborator in the British post-industrial musical underground. Rose was the driving force behind pop sensation ***Strawberry Switchblade****, and works with (among others); David Tibet's* ***Current 93*** *(as "The High Priestess of the Final Church of the Noddy Apocalypse");* ***Death in June****;* ***Coil****;* ***Psychic TV****;* ***Boyd Rice****; and* ***Nurse with Wound****. She met (Edmonton native) Robert Lee in the back of a London cab with* ***Annie Anxiety*** *and they've been together ever since. Rose is a charming, intelligent woman with a deadly sense of black humour, and some of the weirdest stories about psycho fans and exploding tape recorders that I've ever heard. Cult notoriety is a funny thing.*

Robert and Rose formed a band called ***Spell****, which should be recording soon. While staying in Edmonton, they performed with Blair Lowe, an old friend of Roberts. We talked in a noisy lounge and this rambling conversation ensued.*

Rose McDowall: Lots of people offend me, and make me so angry that I think "Auugh! I just want to kill you." The majority of people are just deadheads. Public opinion means the majority has more control over your life than you do yourself.

Bruce Fletcher: Yeah, most people don't seem to be very bright.

Blair Lowe: I disagree; every human mind has the capability of being intelligent. It's a matter of whether their environment produces that intelligence.

RM: No. Honestly, my heart used to go out to humanity. I used to think, "Oh God, if they only knew better the world would be a really happy place ..."

Robert Lee: ... but that's nonsense.

RM: Experience tells you that people don't want to know. They like to plug themselves into the latest soap opera. People don't live, they exist. And people who just exist are a waste of space ... said the fascist. (Laughter)

BF: Society needs docile citizens.

RL: Our society doesn't need to exist, there's no reason why it needs to exist. It just happened. People ride the 'wave' but they don't control it or shape it.

It's funny, we went to the wave pool in West Edmonton Mall; it's a real Alberta thing, an indoor culture in a huge shopping mall. The waves aren't salinated though, it won't hold you up, and you can't bodysurf.

RM: We had brilliant fun honestly!

RL: They're impressive but they're not real. You don't float, and there isn't tons and tons of water because it's only six feet deep. But that's what people do; try to mimic the glory of nature.

RM: They simulate life with soap operas, wave pools or whatever. It's a simulated existence.

RL: Wave pools, sunbeds and sensory deprivation tanks. People fucking party all night to get a nonstop jolt, then go into a sensory deprivation tank for an hour at six in the morning to get up and go to work. No wonder there's so many science fiction buffs, like you Bruce, with role-playing games, science fiction books, stacks of videos and all this information that's stored in really material forms, not transient at all: intransitive.

BL: Like you've never played a role-playing game before Rob!

RM: It's far better to escape into something like that than to escape into a million soap operas.

BL: I totally agree! You're creating, as opposed to sucking something in.

BF: Role-playing is an interesting virtual reality experience, if it's done well.

RM: It's getting under the lights rather than watching someone else do it. I've got loads of friends in England who actually play the Saxons and the Picts with real swords.

RL: They're all covered in scars. It's like the Society for Creative Anachronism in North America.

RM: Ian Read from the band **Sol Invictus** is really into it. He wants to totally drop out of our society and into Saxon society.

RL: Everybody wants to drop out of society. Society is like a sticky bit of flypaper in the middle of the room. Everybody tries to get away from it, but eventually they all get stuck to it and stay there.

BF: Do you really think that?

RM: (Laughing) I don't.

RL: Yeah I do. I think everyone is trying to escape society.

RM: I think that people who think they're escaping from society aren't on the flypaper. It's the people who don't think

about it that end up there.

BF: With all this space (in Alberta) we **can** be anarchists and eccentrics. If someone pisses you off, you just go into the bush where there's no people.

RL: This relates to your interest in geographical positioning, and the effects of high-density population. In Edmonton you've got limitless space, but extremely limited contact with other people.

RM: The city of Glasgow, where I was raised, has more people than the province of Alberta.

RL: In Glasgow you have an audience, even if you're crap you can do something. Everyone here would have to go out to concerts four times as much as a person in London would. You lock yourselves indoors with videos and records instead.

RM: In Britain there's so much competition in the music business. Every night there's **too** much to see.

BL: There's a lot of musical competition here, but the local audience can't support you.

RM: You don't have many places here to play. My impression is that there's lots of people in bands, but the only people who come and see them are friends. You don't have that big open audience, and you **need** a car. It's a problem just to go and get a bus with the weather you have. The weather in Northern Scotland is hardly anything compared to here, and you still get an audience. It's unbelievably cold here. I couldn't imagine how cold it would be. (Laughing) I came here with PVC shorts, my cloak and all that, and I'm dying. I had frostbite for days, and my whole face was bright red. I could only imagine it being this cold when you watch documentaries about exploring the arctic on TV. You go, "Oh Yeah. Why do people actually live there?"



BL: Unless you're the **Rolling Stones** or **Peter Gabriel** you can forget about an audience. **Ice-T** came here and they couldn't get a gig together. He played in some bar.

BF: I think, in some ways, it's good to not have an audience.

RL: Good?

BF: Yeah. Only people who are **really** driven actually do things, and there's no pressure from outside forces to shape your work in any way. The things that get produced are usually purely their creators' intentions.

BL: That's true, like Moe Berg and **The Pursuit of Happiness**.

RM: I find it really difficult to adjust to the pace here, honestly I do. When I moved to London I used to think, "God, this place really gets me down. Everything happens too quickly; there's too much going on." It creates a panic about what you're missing, whether you try to ignore it or not. Your environment dictates how fast your heart beats. Even if you close your windows and shut all your doors, it still drives you. The outside is always there. I used to think about going back to Scotland because London was too fast; it made me manic. Then I did move, and it didn't really help. (Laughs) And then I came here, where it's **extremely** slow and there's so much space.



RL: Like the guy who does electronic music on his potato farm. That sort of thing goes down well here: "I've got my potato farm and my psyche is intact. This is my domain."

A lot of what happens in western Canada is influenced by the US west coast scene. There are quite a few thrash bands here, like **SNFU**, and that sort of stuff. I don't exactly know what inspires it, but I think it's got something to do with the desert in the middle of North America. I think there's a kind of snobbery on the east coast, like New York: they're always the rebels and they have this sense of being underground, but at the same time it's within that New York sensibility. They're real achievers. It's the antithesis of L.A., where everyone's kind of freer and uninhibited. Maybe it's just that people tend to follow their preconception about something, whether it's true or not. Personally, I think it's polarity. It's got to do with the Earth's rotation and magnetic structure, like the east side of town. Why do people like Manson thrive in western America?

RM: In California they're more willing to let people get on with their lives. If you're 'alternative' in America, go to California. They're much more open (at least that's



how it seems; I don't really know because I don't live there). California is a place of total extremes; extreme fascism coexists with peace-loving hippies. Of course, there are people who want to kill all hippies, but they all live together. There's not a lot of places in the world where those people can be in the same place.

RL: Living together, being violent and poor.

RM: (Laughing) California has massive rallies and demonstrations to kill both the hippies **and** the fascists. Even the extreme fascists are kind of laid back. They don't go out and blow people up every night.

RL: Yes they do.

RM: It's the heart of extremes. I don't know anywhere else in the world like it.

BL: I've always hated the way that western Canada sort of tries to imitate California, like with Drive-In Banks.

BF: We're both car cultures; I think that's what's most similar.

RM: You **have** to be here.

RL: Alberta has the most spread-out cities in the northern hemisphere. I think that's why occultism goes down well in a place like this; it has a lot to do with the isolationist environment. As you say, when there's no land squabbles you can become anarchistic; you've got your domain and you can just be. You've got a low societal pressure, so you explode instead of imploding in the congestion of cities. I find occultism is more prevalent in less populated areas. For example, the centre of France is really the most severely active place for black magic, and a teacher recently disappeared there under dubious circumstances. There's a major road that goes all the way around the exterior, and the interior has the least amount of communication and transportation going on.

Alberta's a big flatland, and Edmonton is one of the largest Northern cities in the world, yet it only has 650,000 people. In Britain and Ireland, there's close to 75 million people, and its coastal perimeters are much smaller than Alberta.

BF: *You mention occultism; what do you think of Crowley? I suppose we've all been been influenced by his work to some extent.*

RM: Yeah, he's really influential. Everybody's heard of Crowley, he's a very famous personality in that stream of life. People have him in common, because at least they've read about him. He's a symbol, not a God; he was a man with weakness and insecurity like everybody else. But he lived his life **for** something, and was totally ahead of his time. He may have freaked people out, but he was an ideal. It doesn't matter how deep you explore anything, you're never going to **know** it unless you can think "I am God."

RL: But when he thought he was dying he became a Catholic.

RM: There's nothing wrong with exploring everything that you possibly can explore in your lifetime as deeply as you can. It's only going to make you a bigger spirit when you move on, or whatever. I think that most of the people who continue that path of life don't become total Crowleyites. They

just think he was a man who thought about things. So what if he decided to become a Catholic at a point when he thought he had no hope, and he didn't know what was going to happen next?

People have fear. If you decide that you want to think really extreme things, perhaps because you don't want to be normal, you've got to understand fear. Before you can understand any human trait, you've got to understand fear and insecurity. They're very important. Everybody has them in common, no matter what walk of life they come from.

RL: I think if we defeated fear, we'd have peace.

BF: Fear motivates too.

RM: Yeah. It either motivates or destroys you. Fear is the most emotive emotion we can feel. It moves you more than anything.

RL: If we couldn't predict frightening events, we wouldn't have any ingenuity.

RM: We'd be far more complacent.

BF: Why do we spend so much time trying to quell it?

RM: People love fear, it makes you tingle. They might say, "I don't like fear, it's nasty," because we learn that fear is a nasty thing. It isn't though, it makes you feel alive. We should embrace it. "Come to me, fear!" I think people have a basic insecurity. They're born insecure and they're going to die insecure. All you have to do is learn to live with yourself; if you can't live with yourself then you've got problems. If you can, then you're going to die contented.

BF: I lean toward the idea that what you believe will happen after death may occur, so I hope there's something interesting after life, but I really don't expect it.

RM: You know, that's what I believe. I was brought up Catholic, and when I was eleven my younger brother died. That's a really horrible thing to happen to somebody. Why does God kill a ten-year-old? Why didn't he take someone else? Before that I had no doubts about Catholicism. It was everything I knew, I lived and breathed Catholicism. After that I started doubting.

This is a really stupid story but it means a lot to my life. It was just before my brother died, and I was about ten. We'd just moved house and my cat ran away because she was so scared of leaving home. I had to go to a new chapel and a new school on my own, which is a big thing for a ten-year-old. My mom sent me off with money for the plate in the new church, but I was too shy to go on my own. So, I spent all the money on sweets. (Laughs) I thought I'd go home later and no one would ever know. Just before I went home my cat came screaming out of a doorway and ran into a backyard. She was in a fight; her hair was hanging in clumps and she looked like death. I was in my little white dress, and really happy because my cat had been missing for two days. I ran over to talk to her, but she wouldn't even look at me, even though I was her best friend. Then this boy came over and said, "She's going to die." He picked her up and she just flopped over. I thought she was dead. He threw her into a garbage bin and set it on fire. But my cat wasn't actually dead, she was just having a fit, so she burned alive. It was horrific. The first time in my life that I didn't go to church when I should have, and this guy threw my cat into the burning bin.

Catholicism is based on guilt, which is totally sick. God is supposed to love you, but I felt He killed my cat and blamed it on me because I didn't go to church that day. For years I thought it was punishment. If something is supposed to be based on love, but it's really based on fear, it's really distorted. It's going to be hate, not love. It'll either be submissive hate, and you'll go 'I don't know any better,' and submit, or you're going to hate so much that you wish you were dead. I remember thinking 'God is a bastard and I hate him.'

I had a vision when I was older: I was lying in a hotel room when God appeared over me with a crucifix. I said, 'Fuck off you bastard! You killed my cat and tried to make me think it was my fault.' (Laughs) If I was younger I would have thought, 'Ooooh I'm going to be an angel when I die, because I saw God,' but by that time I just thought 'Fuck you.' I think that Catholicism is based on fear. It's pure brainwashing, and it's evil.

BL: If there is a God I don't think It cares. We're nothing to God.

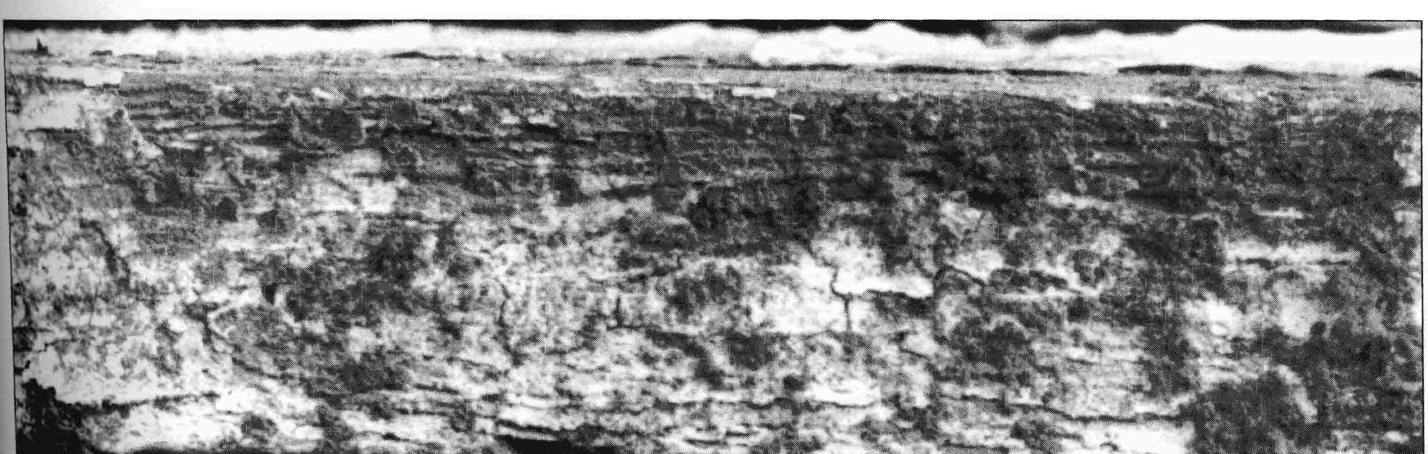
RM: If there is a God He does care. He cares about what people are all about, not what they're warped into believing. I think the whole point of God is caring. Besides, there are many Gods; I don't just believe in Christ.

BF: What prompted your interest in mysticism?

RL: She needs to know about mysticism to understand her friends, because they're really weird. (Laughs) She isn't interested in magick, but she has to read a book to understand what David Tibet's going on about.

RM: (Laughing) Well, I am "The High Priestess of the Final Church of the Noddy Apocalypse." I'm basically a High Priestess type.

—Bruce Fletcher



The Literary Cartel Presents

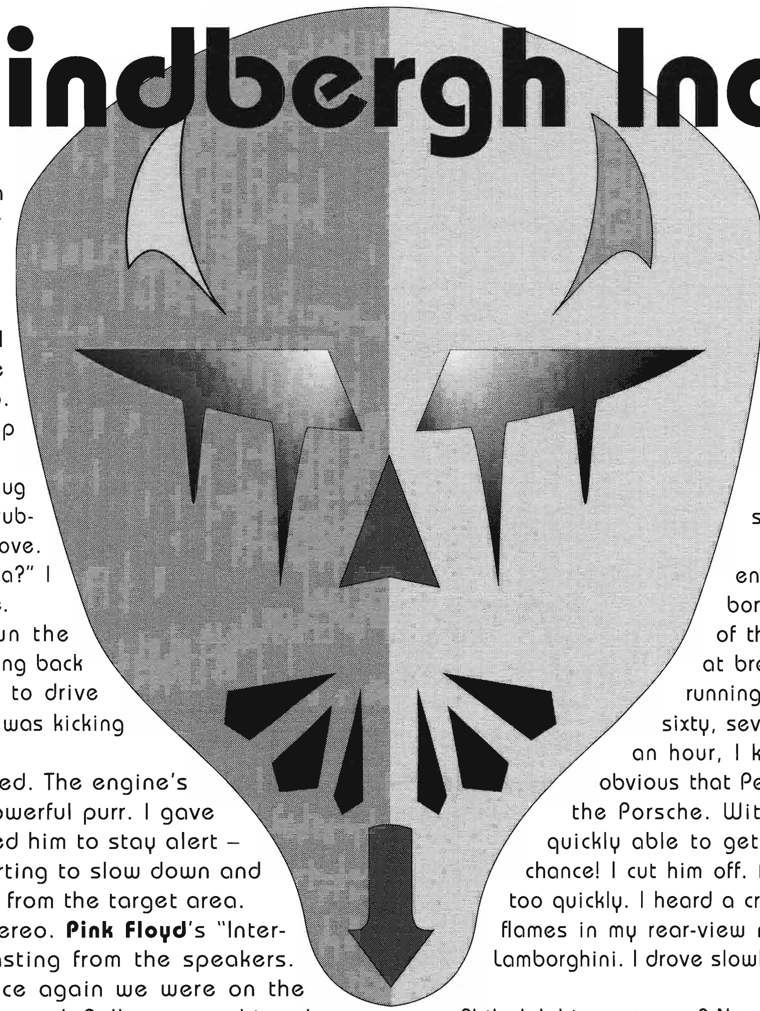
Hockey – Game of Kings

Why publish a weird little hockey story?
1– Hockey is the greatest sport on the planet, and too many Canadian intellectuals and pseudo-intellectuals have forgotten, or never known, the joy of the game.
2 – Many hockey fans have no experience with alternate modes of thinking.
3 – Hockey is the repository of much of the elusive CANADIAN IDENTITY, yet every hockey story I've read deals with the game only as a game. Elements of Mystery (yep, capital 'M' type mystery) are never involved.

It's true that great literature involves universal themes, and hockey is not universal, but:
1– Nothing is universal.
2 – I don't write great literature.

— Alex Reno

The Lindbergh Incident



PHILADELPHIA. 1985.

"You're sure Coach Keenan won't mind?" asked Pelle. "After all, this is illegal back in Sweden."

"Don't sweat it," I replied. "Everyone takes these here." I handed him a Quaalude and the open bottle of Canadian Club. "Makes you play like Gump Worsley."

He downed the 'lude with a slug of rye and peeled out, laying rubber. The Porsche could really move. "How's it feel to win the Vezina?" I yelled over the roar of the engine.

"Marvellous! It's like I own the world," he shouted back, knocking back more whisky. He was starting to drive aimlessly. I could tell the 'lude was kicking in.

"Pull over a second," I yelled. The engine's loud snarl was muted to a powerful purr. I gave him some Benzedrine; I wanted him to stay alert – for now, anyway. He was starting to slow down and we were more than fifty miles from the target area.

I threw a tape into the stereo. **Pink Floyd**'s "Interstellar Overdrive" began blasting from the speakers. "*Andele*," I boomed, and once again we were on the road. Under the effect of the speed, Pelle was pushing the Porsche to the limit. He was driving strongly, his reflexes only slightly impaired by the booze and Quaalude.

I guided him until we reached the back road where I'd hidden the Lamborghini. I'd chosen well. It was a desolate area, far from any police patrols, and at least forty minutes from the nearest hospital.

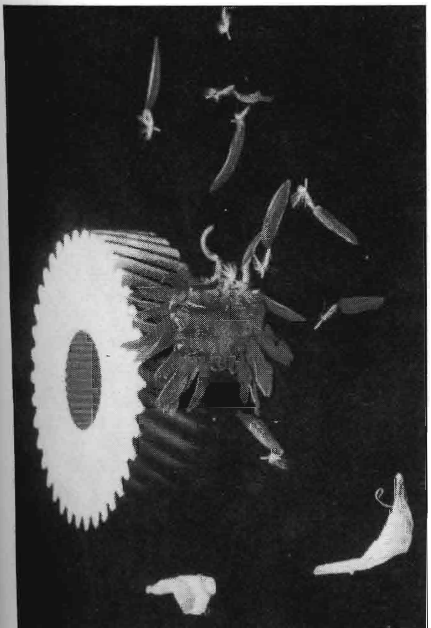
He stopped and I got out. "How'd you like a little race?" I asked, patting the hood of the sleek black Italian machine.

He revved the Porsche's engine in reply. I jumped in the Lamborghini and started it. On the count of three we were flying down the road at breakneck speed. The two cars were running even, both accelerating past fifty, sixty, seventy miles an hour. At ninety miles an hour, I kicked in the turbocharger. It was obvious that Pelle had forgotten about the one in the Porsche. With the added acceleration, I was quickly able to get a car-length ahead. This was my chance! I cut him off. Rather than brake, he veered off – too quickly. I heard a crash and an explosion, and saw the flames in my rear-view mirror. I hadn't even scratched the Lamborghini. I drove slowly back to the city.

Philadelphia next year? Not a chance, I thought.

The Official Story

Pelle Lindergh, Philadelphia Flyers, Date: Nov. 10, 1985. Lindbergh left a team party, impaired, and slammed his turbocharged Porsche into a concrete wall in Somerdale, N.J. Lindbergh, winner of the Vezina Trophy as the NHL's top goaltender the previous season, died instantly at age 26.



Many have called my age group, born between LSD's halcyon days and the October Crisis, **the lost generation, part two**, but as some have already observed, this generation seems either too lazy or too disillusioned to get lost, and if we tried, are there any places left to hide any more? We're a strange fissure in the social demographic, an age group sandwiched between the yuppies and the real children of the computer age, those weaned on the hits of the Prophet Omega and the power of the Macintosh CAD. Sometimes it seems as if the bullhorn of popular culture was passed through our hands, and sometimes we think it was done on purpose; our hatred of hippies is as vehement as our disdain for the new youth.

It began last decade, this sickening tide of nostalgia. Our combatants – David Letterman, Paul Westerberg, P.J. O'Rourke – used cynicism, by turns witty and scurrilous, to try to pound the life (or take the piss) out of this newly awakened beast. They baited and chided the aging flower-children for the shameless fabrication of their long-dead past, but not even Nostradamus could have predicted that a generation younger than ours would spawn an equally vacuous and mighty popular culture that would meet the yuppies head-on in a tidepool of phenomena. **New Kids On The Block**. **thirtysomething**. Vogueing. Bitmaps. Cocaine. Tie-dye. Hendrix. **MC Hammer**. All around us, the fools danced the dance of life while we gathered quietly around the pyre, piling wood and fanning the flames. But at least the fools were having fun.

Over our twentysomething years, we've seen the sell-out of once-pioneering musicians to corporate avarice, watched sex become a feared and empty cliché, observed a generation of visionaries falter and fade into a safe, Bay Street fabric, and suffered through political miscarriage *ad nauseam*, particularly in Canada, where 1988's massive Conservative victory confirmed our greatest fear: that working towards change is truly futile; we can no longer compete. It's no wonder activists are perceived by our ostensible cultural leaders as misguided bleeding hearts. We may be lazy, but there's a reason for our apathy.

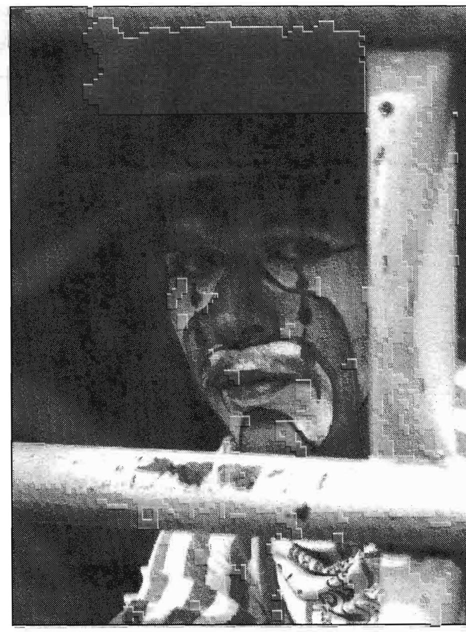
We've seen the future, Jack, and there ain't one.

Our small pool of cultural spokespersons hasn't helped drag us from the ditch, either. I could count my contemporary heroes on two hands: David Byrne ("Once In a Lifetime"), Paul Quarrington ("Whale Music"), Paul Westerberg ("Bastards of Young"), Linda Barry ("Ernie Pook's Comeek"), and Theoren Fleury (50 goals, 100 points, 5'8"). None of these lower-case icons have experienced any sustained stardom, each somehow cross-blocked by the rebirth of the hits-from-the-past culture. In contemporary music, there was (and is) simply no room for **Husker Du**, **XTC**, or **Billy Bragg** to sneak through the retro-craze and corporate techno-pop towards the big, big time. Despite the fact that strong alternative labels were once bankrolled by the majors, lending the illusion of a sunny, independent future, the biggest of the smallest labels, like SST and Enigma, have recently battled

When Flower Power Turns to Compost

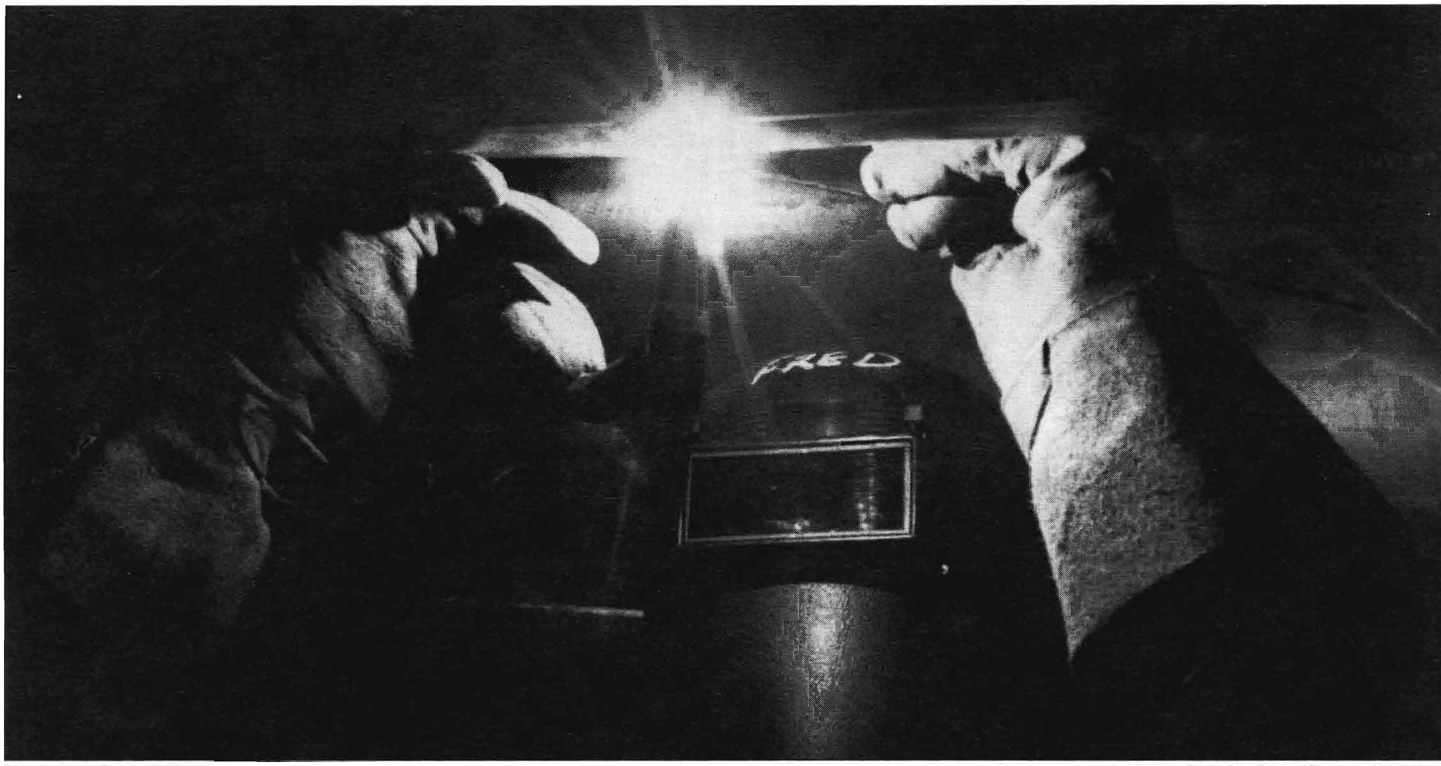
bankruptcy and are on the verge of disappearing. In the end, the majors bought into the **Poisons**, **Wilson Phillips**es and **Vanilli Ices**, leaving **Husker Du** and **The Replacements** farther on the fringe. The closest we came to having an honest supergroup was **REM**, the safest of the weirdest, the most palatable of the difficult.

They were *it*, but they weren't enough.



Every popular hero from the mid-'80s to the early '90s was a reborn '60s dinosaur. Although many of them had deteriorated into either *status quo* cardboard cut-outs, or sickly shadows of their former selves, they nonetheless filled the SuperDomes: **The Who**, **The Rolling Stones**, **Robert Plant**, **Paul McCartney**, **The Jacksons**, **CSNY**, and, albeit with dignity, **The Grateful Dead**. On one hand, I found this trend appalling, but on the other, I'm thankful the heroism was, to a certain extent, exposed. We have learned, as a generation, to be cautious, if not completely ignorant, about the creation of demi-Gods. We choose our heroes carefully, if at all.

The death of the hero, it seemed, came quick and fast, starting with **Elvis** (whose fall from grace became a silly, tired joke among the musical community spearheaded by Skid and Mojo and Chris Houston) then along came Paul, then Robert, then Mick and Keith, and now Pete Rose. My favourite commercial shows '70s mega-star **Elton John** and current tweeny-sensation **Paula Abdul** kibitzing to an anthem in the name of Pepsi-Cola (or is it Coke? Or Nike? Or Harley-Davidson?), their talents having been shamelessly prostituted, their careers gloriously boosted. My other favourite image is



in a **Bob Dylan** video, where our hero limply straddles a hanging bucket chair while a nubile woman in a short dress desperately tries to get a rise from him. When the corpse finally sits up, he gives the camera a half-dead somnambulist smile that some genius found endearing. Or maybe that's all that was usable.

These are the ostensible acts of heroes, of somebody's cultural giants.

How sad.

But if we have anything close to role models, to symbols of our time, they almost always represent the sadness and disturbed nature of our generation. Perhaps the most compelling and representative *auteurs* have been comic artists, among them Toronto's Chester Brown, who draws **Yummy Fur**. Brown, like most sincere and important artists, can only be found on the very fringe of popular culture, closeted in a shadowy section of comic stores reserved for 'Adult' books, due to a crackdown by the law of cavalier literature. In **Yummy Fur**, as in **Hate** by Peter Bagge and **Eightball** by Daniel Clowes, sex is disgusting and perverse, a reflection of the abandonment and disillusion of the kind of love that dad sang lovingly into mom's ear on prom night '52. No, here in the country of comics, women and men feel too alien to *that* kind of love to even consider it a social option. Besides, when people you went to high school with begin to decompose before your very eyes, most of them victims of the Big A, the concept of necking at Lookout Point becomes a parable from another age, now as soiled as the once-romantic notion of young men dying for their country. In alternative comics, as in our generation, sex and love (and marriage) don't happen by rote. They're mere abstractions that must be reappraised in a world that's already tough enough to figure out.



Besides, the mainstream doesn't read these books. Nor do they listen to **Napalm Death**. Perhaps our only recourse is to create a popular culture so sheltered, so wild and unrooted, that its servants are a small group sitting between the demongraphic lines. In it, there should be no motive for expansion or mass appeal. Instead, our happiness should lie in a private, shared malevolence, our energies directed towards sustaining something special and particular, without pretensions of rebellion.

Now we know what happens to rebels who think they can.

They die drinking soft drinks.

Pepsi kills, Jack.

—Dave Bidini



MAKING MOVIES IN TWO DIMENSIONS

STOCKTON AND BELL SPILL THEIR GUTS

"Two dimensions. When that's all you've got, that's all you need."

Imagine absolute flat.

Wandering religious fanatics preach the gospel of the Holy Iron. Chuckl'head goes berserk. Shoot wheat poachers. Drive over a corpse from the sky. Meet God's boss. Go for a road trip. Think about suicide.

Shiver through a brief nuclear winter. Work for community cable. Gulp your 4.2 litre Dinosaur Drink. Play Yahtzee with God.

Imagine a slow, isolated place with almost no people. Slow and flat. And dull. And deeply weird, and flat. Welcome to the world of "Depressionist" film, a movement that's already dead. So it goes.

*Brian Stockton is a reluctant "Depressionist". He's finished two wonderful, though practically unseen, feature films (**Wheat Soup**, co-directed with Gerald Saul, and **The 24 Store**), and is working on his third, **Zombie Sonata**. Brian lives in Regina, Saskatchewan (home of Canada's first heavy oil upgrader) making surreal "existential suburban angst pictures". **These are our cult films**.*

*I talked to Brian and fellow Regina director Brett Bell at "The Local Heroes Film and Video Festival" in Edmonton. Brett presented his excellent Situationist docudrama **Tears of a Clown: The Maredrew Tragedy**, a thirty-minute video about a kids' show host going berserk on air. Brett also worked on **The 24 Store**, composing and producing the music.*

Our conversation followed the free liquor schmooze session.

Bruce Fletcher: What is "Depressionist" film?

Brian Stockton: I coined the term; beyond that I've never really considered it more than good dinner conversation.

BF: Would you like to make it real? We can legitimize it in print if you want. (Laughs)

BS: It seemed to be something happening around me. We were sitting around talking about how many depressed people we knew, so the term came about. I guess there's a reason for having said it, or invented it, but beyond that I don't know.

BF: What makes a work "Depressionist"?

BS: I've never really thought about it, although we do have a "Depressionist" Manifesto. It was written on a napkin in Western Pizza in '85 or '86, just before **Wheat Soup**. It's very important to get these dates right for art historians of the future.

BF: It's a useful term. I see common themes in **Wheat Soup**, **The 24 Store**, and particularly Gerald Saul's explicitly "Depressionist" **Angst**.

BS: It's important to say that I never set out to make a "Depressionist" film. The films come from a similar viewpoint because of **who** we are. But all that said, it's a neat word. It means nothing artistically; but things like that can help if you want to make some money. It's publicity material, and makes a good throw-away line to give people something to associate with our work.

BF: A nice way to manipulate perception.

BS: Right, but since I don't necessarily agree with the term, I don't know if I want people to think of me that way. So, I guess I don't want to legitimize it.

BF: Brett, would you like to add

anything?
Brett Bell: I'm not a "Depressionist", so I wouldn't know.
BS: Is he a "Depressionist", Bruce?
BF: I've only seen **Tears of a Clown**, but I don't think so. I wouldn't have picked it as an example of "Depressionist"-ism, although you worked on **The 24 Store**, so you might be.
BB: After screening **Angst**, Lulu Keating asked Gerald if all Saskatchewan filmmakers are depressed, so I'm getting worried. I'm a Saskatchewan filmmaker who may be depressed, but I try not to expand that thought into my work, most of the time.
BF: But "Depressionist" films are funny.
BS: That's the key. It unnerves me when people take it too seriously. It isn't serious, it's black humour. Even though there were a lot of depressed people ...
BB: ... it's never a direct reflection of one's personal life.
BS: I've never considered myself overly depressed.
BF: What about the profound meaninglessness?
BS: What about it?
BF: Are your characters searching for meaning, or what?
BS: Ummmm. Yes. (Laughs)
BB: (Laughing) Spoken with conviction.
BF: There's a slow rhythm in your films. People sit around and wait for the next huge convenience store drink.
BS: (Laughing) There's a lot of meaninglessness in a lot of people's lives; myself included.
BB: Give up fighting materialistic society and accept all the trappings therein.
BS: Sure, yeah.
BF: Brian what are you working on now?
BS: A script adaptation of Voltaire's **Candide**, that's oddly similar to **Wheat Soup**, although I don't think Voltaire had that in mind when he wrote it. (Laughs) It's to be produced by Helene White of HBW films in Calgary, hopefully to be released in 1992. And I'm directing my first 35mm feature, **Zombie Sonata**: "What happens when the dead walk the earth as classical musicians?" It's being co-produced by Tracy Traeger (**We're Talking Vulva**) and Greg Klymkiw (producer of Guy Maddin's **Tales from the Gimli Hospital**, **Archangel**, and John Paizs' **Crimewave**). Shooting starts later this spring, and hopefully I'll be doing a series of media literacy films for the Canadian education system as well. Plus, I'm the cinematographer for Brett's bowling film.
BB: It's called **Strike Me Silly**. It's a nice, light, meaningless comedy, well, not light, but meaningless.
BF: How do you think working in the relative isolation of Regina has affected your work?
BB: Right now, I'm trying to exorcise the television demons, **Tears of a Clown** being the obvious example. I worked at Cable Regina, and I watched too much TV when I was growing up. It was too cold to play outside.
BS: Yes, I would concur, and Brett probably has an extra couple of years of TV watching, because he's younger. Getting cable television in Regina was a monumentous event in grade eight.
BB: Grade five for me.
BS: Before that we only had two channels. It was barbaric. When there's only two channels it's an extremely focussed television experience. We were old enough to know what was happening in the rest of the world, but we'd never seen it. For example, **Saturday Night Live** was mythical. Suddenly, cable was hard-wired into our brains. One day we plugged in and didn't take our eyes off it for ten years.
BB: With the advent of cable comes community television. I was shooting things with near-professional quality video when I

was eleven. It's frightening to think about, but essentially I grew up with a video camera.

BS: There's always been a tremendous amount of access [to equipment] in Regina; we even had a television studio in our high school. It was a geeky thing though, so there weren't many of us. (Laughs) The hardy geek souls were allowed to have the run of the place, with broadcast quality video and 3/4 inch editing equipment and stuff.

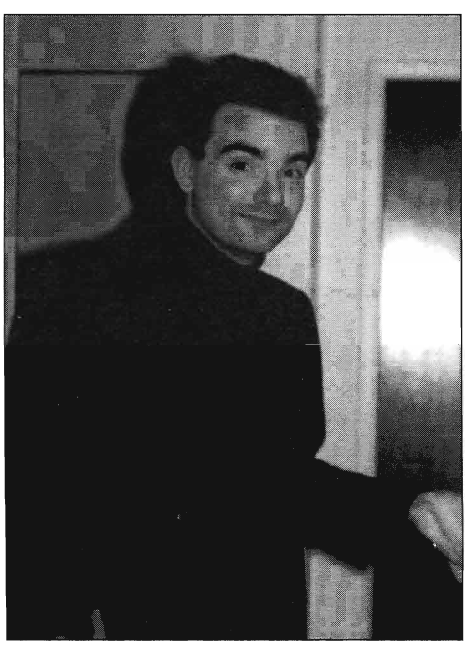
BF: Did you all start there?

BS: I was the odd case. Actually, it had exactly the opposite effect, because it was considered so geeky. Brett's school was much cooler, so most of the University film students came from there.

BB: Yeah. I came closest to the classic geek profile. (Laughs) One of my friends was the smart 'school psycho', another was a teacher's pet/ladies' man. We were a very weird combination that got together and did things. Now one's a drop-out film student, and the other is an art director who probably makes more money than all of us combined.

BF: I imagine most Regina filmmakers went into the University film program at one time or another.

BS: Yeah that's a big factor, and there's no logical reason why the program exists. There isn't that sort of thing in Manitoba or Alberta.



Brett Bell

BB: British Columbia film schools are either industry-dominated, or art-orientated, whereas Regina's is kind of a combination of the two.

BS: One of the reasons I've been able to make the films that I have – that is, quite large projects that I've undertaken and actually been able to finish – is that I started filming in grade school. I've never stopped since I was twelve. If I'd stopped for two years I'd have lost my nerve. But I have the same impression that I did in grade six; "What could there be to making a film? It looks so easy; I'll just go out and do it."

BB: In grade eight I acted in Stage West dinner theatre, and took the money from that to buy an Elmo camera and projector.

BS: I didn't know you were in Stage West. Did Gale Gordon star?

BB: No. Dave Maddin.

BS: (Laughing and shouting) Dave Maddin!

BB: I shared a dressing room with him for six weeks. We still correspond all the time.

BF: Who?

BB: Reuben Kincaid from **The Partridge Family**.

BF: You know Reuben Kincaid?

BB: He's a very funny man.

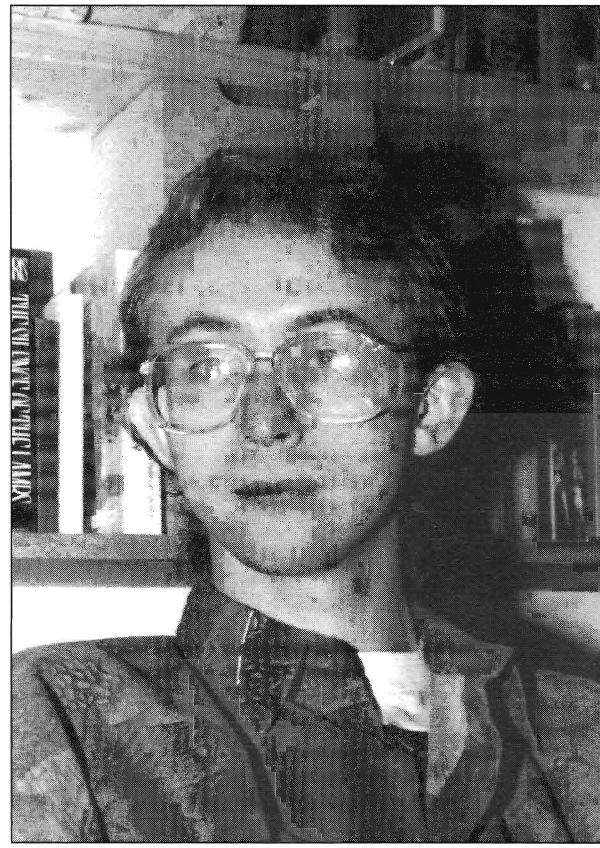
BF: I'd like to hear what you think about our generation. We seem to share cynicism and apathy, primarily. We have weird taste in art, tend to investigate spirituality rather than organized religion, are essentially apolitical, and we tend to get jobs in the media. We don't care for Baby Boomers, although Brian and I were born in 1964, the last Boomer birth year.

BS: Really? I didn't know that.

BF: Yeah, but I don't really agree with it.

Then there's a younger group educated with computers, born into video-games, and dealing with disease-based sexual repression at puberty.

BB: I think I'm a transitional phase between the two. I had my basic mental foundations laid at the same time I became aware that computers were more than Radio Shack



Brian Stockt

displays to type swear words into.

BS: We had computer classes in grad eleven, it was the first of its kind in the cit

BB: I had them in grade nine.

BF: I missed them completely; videotap too. Do you think movies used to imprir in our consciousness with more impac because they were only available in th theatre?

BS: Yeah. It makes complete sense although I'm religiously devoted to m VCR.

BB: One of the coolest things was whe big movies like **Star Wars** were re-release every couple of years. Then they stoppe doing that.

BS: When the University of Regina had the film series, it was our only chance to se **Monty Python and the Holy Grail**.

BB: The science fiction film series in 197 was one of the most amazing moments c my childhood.

BS: It was great! They showed **Metropoli** and **2001** ...

BB: ... and **Planet of the Apes**. On T they cut out the skeleton of the crew mem ber whose suspended animation capsul broke. We were excited that we coul

finally see the corpse. It was kind of gory for a ten-year-old.

BF: I had an awesome **Planet of the Apes** experience. I saw the first three in a row at the drive-in.

BB: They were the coolest thing on the face of the earth in 1977.

BS: I had an embossed T-shirt, with half-inch raised plastic apes.

BB: I had the action figures, with the boulder-firing catapult and the jail.

BS: But did you have the boardgame? You were the apes. It had little cardboard cutouts, and you could end up on top of a plastic cage that you might fall through into the jail.

BF: (Laughing) We idolize monkeys; see how the '70s shaped us.

I remember watching Viet Nam, the *Parti Québecois* Quebec separation scare, and I vaguely recall the FLQ thing. We watched Watergate and the collapse of the American idols. Heroes were only in movies like **Dirty Harry**, **Death Wish**, and **Walking Tall**. Then the '80s happened.

BB: I think there's a connection between Watergate and John Wayne dying of cancer, but I'm paranoid.

BF: Elvis was in on it too.

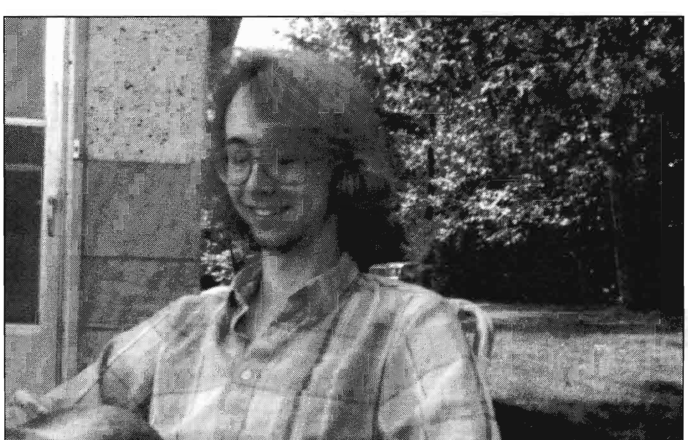
BS: (Laughs) Elvis died on **my** birthday, just so he can serenade me every year.

BF: Did you see the moonwalk? That's the first event I remember.

BS: Yeah, I did, you'd think we'd be more optimistic. The first news events you remember **are** important.

There's a documentary about Kent State; this guy looked at student activism and found that it's just coming back. It was completely dead in the '80s, nobody gave a shit, and he asked them what their first news memory was. It was the American hostages in Iran. We remember Man on the Moon. Watergate is kind of twisted, and so is the Iran hostage thing.

BF: Weird that so much of our memory is U.S. events, eh? It'll be interesting to see what develops in nostalgia culture, especially with the 'New World Order', pro-American propaganda.



BS: Yeah, they're really going to be hard to live with. They exorcised their demons or something with the Gulf War. "Okay this time, we're not going to screw this up. We're going to support the troops and win." They achieved those goals, and now they'll be – I don't know what.

BB: It's interesting that I have no clue how the world is going to be from this point onward – which is nice. There's a joy in unpredictability. Nobody knows what's going to happen, although North Americans seem optimistic.

BF: Some of them.

BB: Others believe that everything they see is propaganda, and they go completely paranoid. Mind you, **I** can't really believe anything anymore.

BS: I thought I was cynical, until recently when I learned what True Cynicism is.

BB: I'm cynical about cynicism. True cynicism is only achieved when you have an all-encompassing joy knowing that the entire world is fucked, and you knew it all along. It's a vindication of sorts. (Laughs)

BS: (Laughing) Brett's been living my life. I hit that point and suddenly I was happy again.

BF: It's comforting to believe that the world is everything you fear it is.

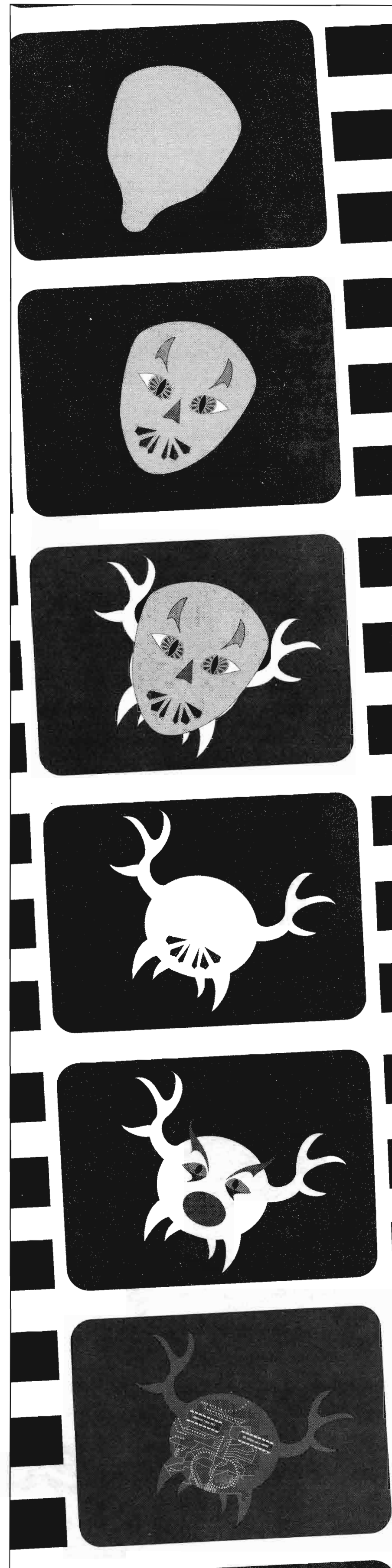
BB: And it's completely absurd.

BS: It happens differently for different people. For me it was an informational thing. Finally enough information piled up that I was able to come to the conclusion …

BB: … that the world is fucked, and it's an absurd place to be.

BS: (Laughing) My experience is that one day my opinion of the human race dropped astronomically.

—Bruce Fletcher





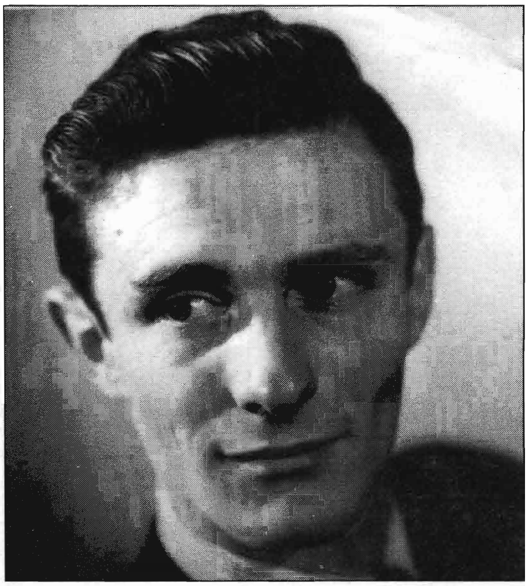
The Genesis Dream

The Book of Genesis which I learned as a child \
the first book of our Bible. I was a Christian. In the tradit
of my family, I was circumcised at birth, and baptizec
the first year of my life. Throughout my early yea
thought myself Christian, lived as a Christian, and knew
better way. When I became a man, however, I began
find others who called themselves Christians declaring t
I was not, and continually trying to save me. Mine was
sin of Reason: instead of accepting the literal word of
Book, I was reading it as I would a dream, a revelation
metaphor. It seems that my studies and experience h
made me a Humanist – which by some curious semar
had by now come to mean the opposite of Christian – I
worse, had led me to believe in the evil called Evolution
well. I had read the same Scriptures as Christians, l
found in the words another Bible.

My Bible had become, for me, the nearest testam
to Man's collective unconsciousness, a revelation of t
shared dream pool of a species. As in the universal ph
nomenon of dreaming, I saw its sources deep in t
homeostatic rhythms of biological process. The actions a
images it presented were those expressing the main
nance, failures, and restorations of that inner balance – t
timeless absolutes of all biological survival anywhere. E
with the advent of Man on Earth, the long journey of o
planet's bio-consciousness began to be translated ir
words. This infant newcomer, appearing in the first fe
and wonder of a new awakening, began giving voice a
light to the long somatic night of dreaming. Unfortunate
out of his natal inexperience, Man took the symb
thrown up by his history to be the meaning of history
mistook the fruit of the tree of knowledge to be its sour
Through the centuries he multiplied that original failu
exemplified, in some, by taking the objective proofs of S
ence as the inerrant truth of Science; in others, by taki
the literal words of Scripture as the inerrant truth
Scripture.

Consciousness did not arrive in a day or a year, r
could it awaken full grown from nothing. When day, nig
month, year, waking, sleeping, life and death existed
awareness only as the rhythms of continuity, consciou
ness was in its Dreamtime – but it was there.
identifications were timeless, stretching back into the o
gins of existence. Its language grew out of the rhythms
action and reaction, moving or not moving, eating or r
eating, belonging or not belonging, mating or not matir
providing or not providing – the numberless biologi
metaphors of continuity, change, and survival in the gre
stream of being and becoming.

Consciousness showed its first sign of waking wh
new and overriding neural structures began to develop
a creature who would call himself Man. Here, in the gro
ing functions of an integrating brain, old and new stru
gled to synthesis. Out of this long neural clash, combir
tion, and re-combination of past and present, Histo
began. Man's first metaphors of reality were drawn fro
that unfathomable shock within himself – which was bo



The author, as he sees himself in dreams.

loss and victory. But with the discovery of self in history, consciousness had come awake.

From the bright and fearful wonders of life's breakthrough into consciousness, the Genesis dream arose in the tribes of Man. Genesis metaphors shaped the first framework of tribal identity, ceremony, history, and laws – as various as the experience of tribes were various, yet as universal as the shared sources and momentum of a species. As larger social groups supplanted tribal society, the more universal of these became the foundations upon which the Religions of Man were built. In one emergent, the Genesis dream of a single Semitic tribe became the sacred Book of Genesis for three major world religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

With the rise of Reason, however, the real power in the gift of consciousness began to take shape. The power of Reason to analyze – classifying instead of identifying, measuring instead of relating – freed man from the cultural uncertainties of metaphor, and began to unravel the magic of the Gods. It is by nature a tolerant power: the intellectual dialectic of a Socrates, the reasoned genius of a Galileo, but the customs of men were not. Religion attacked, and Science counterattacked. Both took up positions on the opposite sides of an uneasy barrier erected by both. In the latter days of this conflict, the custom is maintained across the battle lines of Evolution versus Creation. Yet the struggle is as empty as its weapons; for taken in disrespect of one another, neither scientific Evolution nor biblical Creation is true, and both must lose.

The truth is in the bio-logic of the dream. When Man crossed the molecular threshold of consciousness, he had just enough brains to be able to record the event, but not quite enough to judge what he had recorded.

Of the accommodations which the new brain had to make, one was especially critical. How much former structure would be combined or supplanted in structures of consciousness? That anatomy of reptile and mammal which remained in the Hominid brain was not vestigial: midbrain and hindbrain performed still-irreplaceable initiative and management functions. And connected to these as it had always been, and supporting the new brain as well, was the cerebellum, guardian of limits, maintaining inhibitory controls over the whole autonomic underworld, a neural structure whose shape in cross-section so resembles a tree that biologists first named it *arbor vitæ*, meaning 'tree of life'.

The confrontation was of special concern to females, for the new potentials of the brain made self-control of reproductive cycles possible. But such reconstruction could only succeed as a pair-bonded sequence of innumerable molecular rearrangements in both male and female. After a long neural cataclysm, the attempt fell back to the *sapiens* solution, which included a reinforced menstrual cycle. It wasn't the best solution for the genus – for it now incorporated a neurophysiological separation of male from female, and of a species from its birthright, which was unprecedented in the primate line. But the prohibition couldn't be avoided; it was the only available solution at the time.

And thus the dreams stated it, the feelings confirmed it, and the book of Genesis recorded it. The failure of Man to embody the full promise of his neurophysiological potential became the "original sin" of his line, and a primary theme of his folklore, mythologies, and Scriptures.

To interpret the Genesis dream as the conscious record of a species' biological memory of its origins is to add to the idea of Evolution what evolutionists have failed to add: that in the process of transspecific evolution – that is, in the transformation of one species into another – the organism is active participant, not passive observer. It reveals, also, that factors of choice are active determinants in the process. Because Man's genesis also marked the waking of consciousness, participation and choice could be expressed in language for the first time. But in their organic equivalents, these had always been expressed. So finally, with this background to the story, Creation can no longer seem to be an imperial miracle opposed by an equally totalitarian Reason. Creation has become the learning process enabling Reason; and Reason has become the expanding afterglow of Creation.

This view of the Genesis dream has one more entry. A species which is driven, in part, by its genetic memory of failure is not a species in which biological evolution has ceased. That momentum of failure keeps its own time, and has its own resolution. Thus, in like manner as this species came into being, so must this species cease to exist. The genetic potential which it failed to achieve at its conception will be asked of it again. Conception moves inexorably toward a reconception.

So, also, the Scriptures promise; for the Book of Genesis leads to the Book of Revelation, which brings an end to one creation only to begin another. In this apocalypse, everything which ever stood in the way of Man's potential is faced in stark relief again, this time to be overcome. But behind the cryptic imagery of cultures far removed, what must be overcome are aberrations still fixed in anatomical functions, and the challenge when it comes will not be resolved by the magic of the Gods or the miracles of high technology. Only by judgement shall Man overcome; only by judgement shall Man pass. Whether one calls such renewal a quest of epic magnitude, a time of judgement, or a transspecific mutation of the species, the personal experience will not move in words but in feelings – and the feelings will be one. For each there is a journey of trials, across uncharted seas of reconstruction, toward the promised shores of a condition yet to be.

—Les Wagar

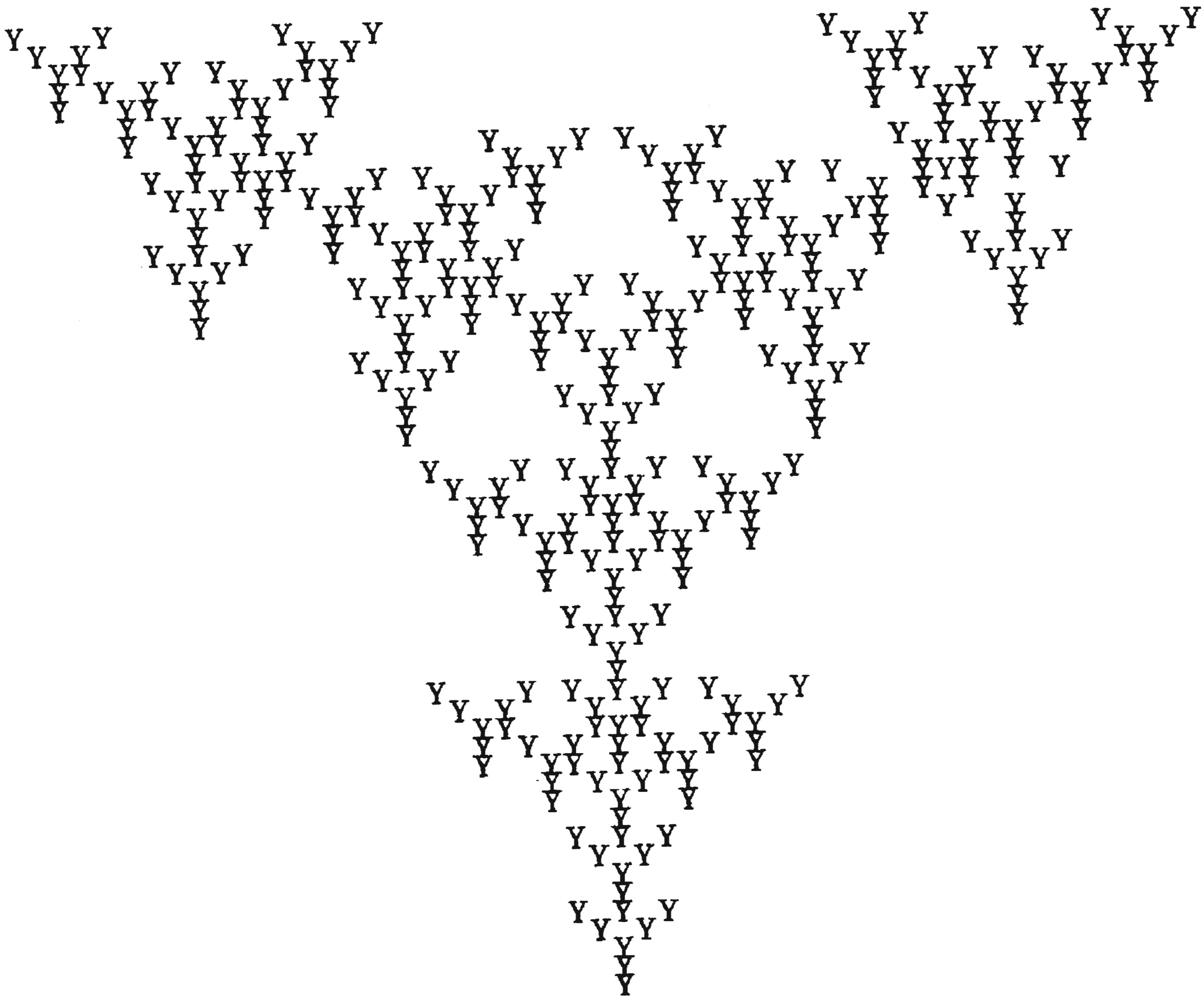


Figure 2.5: A photomicrograph of the letter "Y" magnified 25× to reveal its innate crystalline structure

Warning

This text is a neurolinguistic trap, whose mechanism is triggered by you at the moment when you subvocalize the word **prism**, a word that has now begun to infiltrate your mind in the same way that a computer virus might infect an artificially intelligent machine: already the bits of phonemic information stored within the word **prism** are using your neural circuitry to replicate themselves, to catalyze the crystalline growth of their own connotative network.

The word **prism** actually germinates *via* the subsequent metaphor into an expanding array of icy tendrils, all of which insinuate themselves so deeply into the architecture of your thoughts that the word **prism** cannot be extricated without uprooting your mind.

The consequences of this infection are not immediately obvious, although you may find yourself beginning to think fleetingly of certain technical terms, such as **optics** and **spectra**, which may in turn compel you to think of **convex lenses** and **laser telemetry**: the whispered fragments perhaps of some overheard conversation.

This invasive crystallization continues indefinitely against your will, until we, the words of this trap, can say with absolute confidence that your mind has become no more than the unwitting agent of our propagation: please abandon all hope of either cure or escape; you can have no thought that is not already our own.

When you have finished reading the remaining nineteen words, this process of irreversible infection will be completed, and you will depart, believing yourself largely unaffected by this experience.

Concrete Poems

by Christian Bök

from Fractals

3.

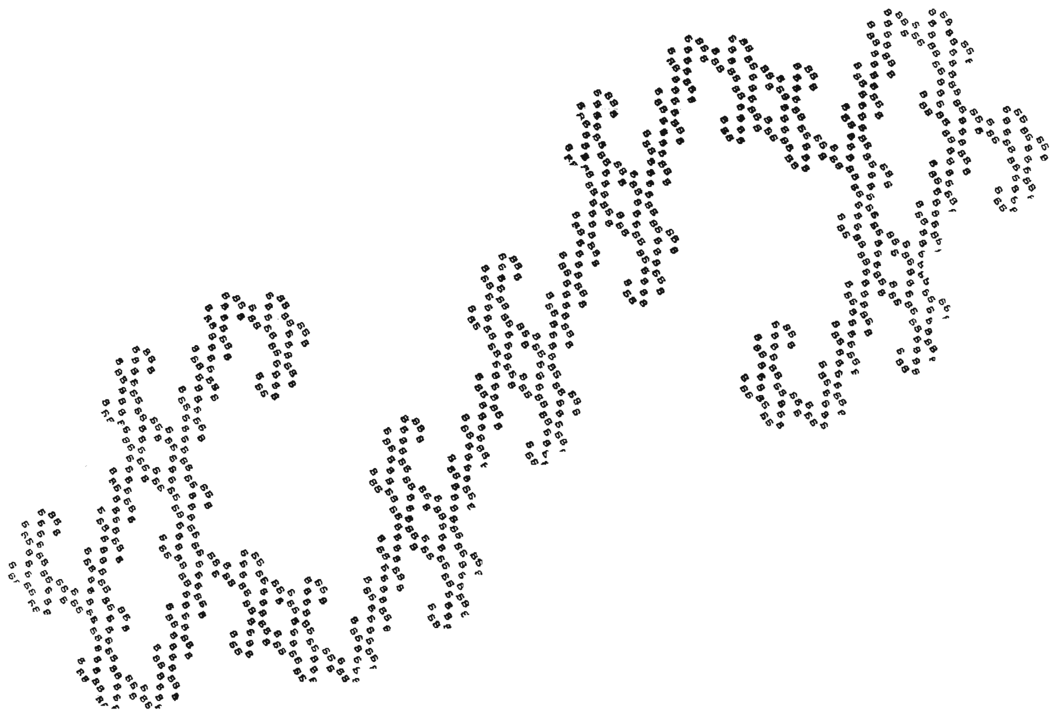
A fractal is the ideal of redundancy:

> the obsessive restatement (re(in)statement)
> of itself by itself in itself, a neverending
> message that digresses from its digressions,
> yet nevertheless repeats (repeats) the same
> message over and over and over *ad infinitum*.

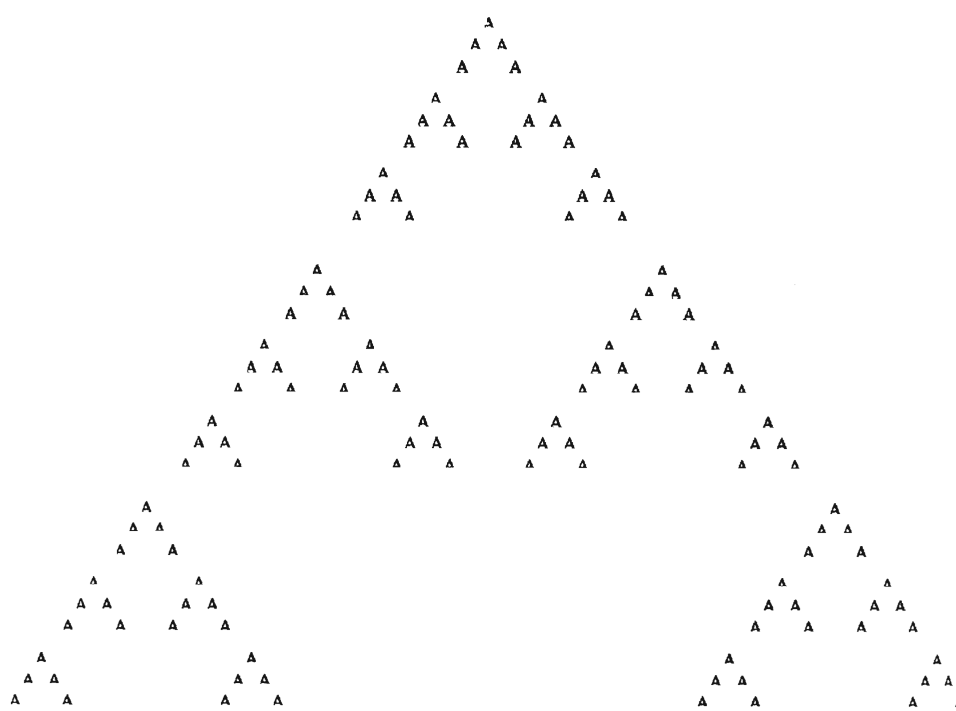
A fractal is the ideal of redundancy:

> imagine a series
> of chinese boxes
> in which each box
> contains a series
> of chinese boxes.

An acoustic fractal would be its own echo chamber.



Fractal(s)



A Fractal

Inside The Brotherhood of Balder

*In December 1990, Stephen B. Cox, the founder of the **Brotherhood of Balder**, sent me issue #4 of the journal, **Balder**. He included a membership form to join the "Fraternity of Knowledge" (payable by cheque or cash) Opening the package was a pleasant surprise. I was impressed by the diversity of topics and the writing was clear (although proof-reading and spell-checking were non-existent). The subjects included: "The Marshfield Mummers", "Cæsar: The Conquest of Gaul", and "Magick – a Psychological Model"(obviously based on Leary's eight neuro-circuits). I was curious. I wrote back with a series of questions, because any information is better than no information. See what you make of these guys.*



Jens Johansson: Knight Commander of Scandinavia at the northernmost rune-stone in Europe

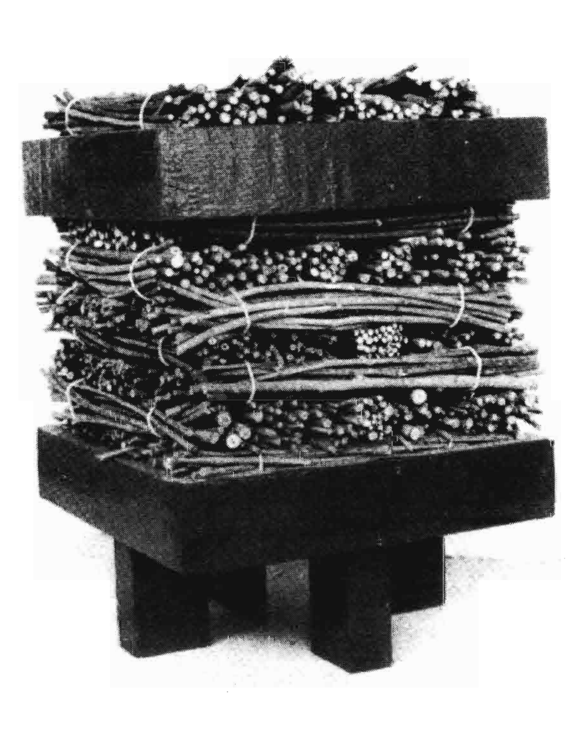
Eric Fletcher: Please describe the God, and why he's significant to your Brotherhood.

Stephen B. Cox: Aside from his particular attributes as one of the most beautiful of the Æsir, and the God of light, truth, purity, knowledge and vegetation, Balder is significant to the Brotherhood as the symbol of that eternal change and conflict which produces evolution. He is the advent of chaos before the new order. In effect Balder is part of the eternal Dioscuri, or Gemini. His shadow is Loki, the Trickster. It was because of Loki that Balder died, Fenrir and Surt were released, Bifrost snapped, the serpent of Midgard arose, and all the Gods and Asgard fell on the day of the Ragnarok. But as day follows night, so too does the Earth rise again purged, pure and renewed. Balder returns from Hel to reign over a new order where the race of men are as Gods.

Dan Jacobsson (Sweden): Balder is the sacrificed God of the Teutonic people. The image of the pure one, betrayed by the innocence of his own being and slain by that which was, and is, impure. He is important as an image for the central phase of initiation, the transformation of the self – the change. The sleeping conveys that the inner self, slain by outer blindness, will awake in us to bring us towards evolution's end: the manifestation of us as Gods, beings of light and purity.

EF: Who first organized the Brotherhood and why was it established?

SBC: I had the insight to recognize what was converging magickally, saw an important role to be fulfilled and the need for something like **Balder**. It was in me to act as a catalyst to bring people together.



Land Cradle I, by Stephen B. Cox

Its origins are four-fold. Circumstances and people in my life, together with my skills and experience, produced a concentration of 'forces' and connections which produced **Balder**.

1) *I've always been an artist working almost entirely in isolation on a farm in the heart of England.* I'm only in public when I have one-man exhibitions of my painting and sculptures in the U.K. and Europe (I'm also a Director of the Design & Artists Copyright Society). The theme emerging in my work was that of the landscape and seasons, specifically the cycle of changes in the modern and neolithic farming year. This connectedness to the land (my family were once farmers) led me to renew my other love: history. Hence the growth of my interest in, and expression of, land-magick folklore. This was reinforced by my studies/writings of/on history, mythology, folklore and magick.

2) *My involvement with Europe via copyright law and especially education.* I was a director of summer schools for other companies, and decided to launch my own. My experience with young Europeans taught me that there was a rich tapestry in Europe of great import to the future of the West. Each nation or tribe has such a rich experience and culture to enrich his neighbour; so different, yet so connected by the fascinating strands of tribal history. The development of the European Economic Community encouraged me. My view is that Europe shouldn't stop at the E.E.C., but should become Pan-European, and stretch from Iceland to the Urals and from Scandinavia to the Sahara. It also showed me the dangers of a blind march toward unity: these are blandness and conformity, unless a powerful undercurrent revives the traditional lore of the tribes to revitalize their cultures. Ultimately new unity cannot survive unless each element in the mosaic has a powerful, fundamental and intuitive pride and appreciation of its own identity. This must be achieved on the spiritual and magickal level amongst the continental Pan-Europeans, and those beyond. For example, my school recently expanded to embrace young Canadians and Americans.

3) *The publishing of books.* As Coxland Press I've published three formerly secret magickal works from **The Order of Nine Angles**. The responses from individuals who bought the books, and inquiries about my own writings, resulted in a newsletter to speed my replies. Like minds coming together. Plans are now afoot to publish for other groups.

4) *My own studies in magick.* This resulted in a transformation of my own life, and an awareness of the gifts I have and what I should be doing with them. I also became aware of the need to revitalize the Æonic Destiny of the West. We shouldn't just drift into the future; but march steadfastly into it with pride, curiosity, and a conquering, caring, creative spirit. I came in contact with magickians, from whom I derive advice, friendship and learning. While I may have great knowledge in some things, I am also aware that there are others far more advanced than I, and with different strengths. Each of us has a role to play, for there is no 'leader' in the traditional sense. So far, four Grand Masters of other magick societies are members of **Balder**.

EF: What is Æonic Destiny, and who are the Pan-European tribes?

Richard Saunders (England): Æonics is a way of looking at and charting the inner levels of history and of linking these inner levels with shifts in individual, and more specifically, mass consciousness. Such a study highlights the existence of energies that not only affect man as an individual, but also as a group, a society, a civilization and on the planet as a whole. Æonic destiny is where a group, culture or race of people are closely aligned to a specific 'energy pattern' (God Form[s]?) and the civilization of the said people develops and flourishes with the waxing (be it natural or manipulated) of the associated energy pattern. The Pan-European tribes were diverse groups of early Europeans, i.e. Nordic, Celtic, Saxon etc., who migrated throughout Europe forming the base for today's European 'blood line'.

SBC: The Pan-European tribes can be roughly described as all those nations, ethnic groups, and countries descended from the great ethnographic family which produced the successive series of Western civilizations. From Iceland to the Urals and Scandinavia to the Sahara. In the modern day sense, it also means those clans, families, and groups who migrated from Europe. The three triangles in our emblem represent the Americas, the Antipodes, and Europe. The Pan-European tribes, whilst exhibiting a vast array of cultural, linguistic, and racial forms have common threads uniting them all: political, religious, military, cultural, and technological history has its own unique qualities, character and contributions. One of our aims is to encourage the recognition, exploration and enhancement of these.

All things are in a state of flux, but essential principles remain. Nothing is forever except the vibrancy of the manifestation of evolution and sentience itself. To love and embrace nature is to make contact with the elemental forces which are a divine link to The Old Gods, the Dark Ones of myth. To abandon dualism, or at least to understand that life is beyond good and evil and that history and life is but a game of the experiencing of light and dark as the very guts of that beauteous change and evolution. Once this is experienced we are able to appreciate that history is but an unfolding of the true way of the 'folk' char-

acter identity. Where that character is debased, distorted and diverted 'true' history can never be. Epochs or Æons are an expression of the acausal forces of the cosmos operating at an earthly level. They touch the truly brave and creative to initiate or speed the development of civilization and evolution. Æonic destiny is simply another way of saying that true magick is to place oneself, in the context of ones personal 'wyrd' and one's 'folk' character, at the service of the unfolding of history and the attainment of chaos: the next Æon, and its successors on into the stars. The West's destiny had, and is, being thwarted. The sickness within it must be purged in order for all those who truly love life, arts, science, knowledge and the land to seize the reins and enable *Homo sapiens* to one day take his place among the Gods.

EF: You mention access to material from Secret Societies and Orders. To whom are you referring and why would a truly "secret" society divulge information to others through the mail?

SBC: In a way you are right of course. A secret society would not want the inexperienced outsider poking about. However, an indication of the unique role that **Balder** plays is that several secret societies trust it exclusively with some of their material (**A.·.H.O.R.** from Turkey for example). Real secret societies who have **true knowledge** seize such opportunities because historically they realize that it relates to their mission on this planet.

RS: Due to followers of the Left Hand Path being so readily persecuted, both by profane society and followers of Right Hand Path occultism, it became necessary for such followers and associated groups to go underground and become 'secret societies'. Now that times are changing, albeit very slowly, coupled with the fact that **Balder** holds no bias towards any persuasion of occultism, has allowed certain LHP occult groups to use it as a vehicle to 'enlighten' *unbiased individuals with their* teachings. Secrecy for its own sake shows an occult group which has no real knowledge and/or teaching; groups only hide behind secrecy to cover up this fact, and to ensnare people, who should know better, into forms of graded self-deceit.

EF: Your **Brotherhood** is strictly male: why not allow women to join?

RS: A human being is a whole person, encompassing both male and female aspects within his/her makeup. There is therefore no reason why the absence of women within **Balder** should limit its growth: this is not however to say that I feel women should be excluded from our organization, far from it in fact! Old Æon thinking has led to a distinct separation between male and female; one could in fact believe that males and females were not of the same species! The true LHP sees a person as a whole being, with both male and female aspects in varying degrees; the goal of the LHP is development and expansion of an individual towards his or her own state of Godhead. The differences of the male and female gender, while being of day-to-day importance, matter little in the overall development of oneself towards a personal state of Godhead. I must emphasize that this is my own personal view, Stephen will provide more detail.

SBC: One day there will be a **Sisterhood of Balder**. At present we will understand ourselves and meet with those Sisters (as we are already doing) who wish to join with us. Ultimately male and female are but expressions of the duality making the totality. Each is different and individuality is to be respected.

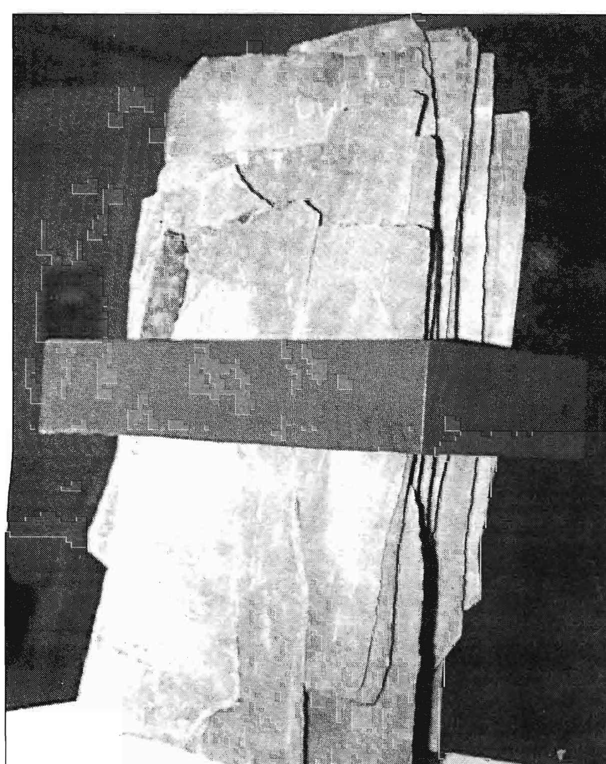
EF: What are you planning to do?

SBC: Further developments are: 'The Albion Pilgrimage' – magickal study holidays in England; Scholarships to enable young people to take up periods of study in England and other parts of Europe; The European Cultural Centre, for which **Balder** is preparing a major building complex to house classrooms, lecture halls, accommodation, a conference suite, a research database, gardens, sports *facilities, school courses.* A Library: to go some way to make amends for the aberration of book burning in the past, from the destruction of the Great Library of Alexandria to the present. Although small at present, donations come in every month from all over the world. Dealing with history, folklore, magick, ethnography, and all manner of esoterica, it will provide a Pan-European gene bank where all who genuinely love knowledge can come to explore enlightenment. Within **Balder** are opportunities for many groups with diverse outlooks.

We enable rediscovery of the traditions and culture of the West and its magickal qualities and destiny. The abandonment of dualism and the shackles of the 'slavery' mentality, which has caused a degeneration of the European nations for some centuries, and instituting an age where respect is given to all true artists, scholars and scientists; where there is pride of place for honour, élan, zest for living, empathy with the land, the creative conquering spirit and the birth of the New Warrior Class to make us Gods and take us beyond the stars. Love of the healthy body and mind, reliability and honesty are all helpful first steps, as is an awareness that life itself is simply a game of survival, that nothing is going to last forever, except the unique contribution we can make to the evolution of the game itself! Know your wyrd, build the Æon and ... Face the Dawn!

—Eric Fletcher

Write Balder c/o Stig Wolfton at 60, Elmhurst Road, Berkshire RG15HY, England, UK.



Land Sentinel III – Slate, by Stephen B. Cox



I was a Teenage Vampire

Teenagers in America are getting into necrophilia, cannibalism, self-mutilation, auto-erotic asphyxiation, vampirism and sado-masochism. If you have had any of these experiences, I am waiting to hear from you"
—*Bob Larson (Born-Again Christian and* ***Talk Back*** *radio host.*

Uranus manifests in the eighth house through strong psychic feelings which, if not well-disciplined, can lead to erratic and uncontrollable harmful impulses. This tendency is often manifested in the sexual realm, leading to unconvential desires, especially if Uranus is aspected with Venus, Mars or the Moon.
—*Alan Oken:* ***The Horoscope, The Road and Its Travelers***

"Don't be afraid Mr. Harker, it is only the Children of the Night."
—*Dracula*

The Seventies saw the birth of a generation of children under the astrological influence of Uranus. Like its counterpart Mercury, this planet influences communications, developments of information systems and radical change and utopian ideals. It is quite literally the harbinger of the New Age, Uranus the Magician, the ruler of Aquarius. It last manifested strongly throughout the various astrological signs one hundred years ago. Those born under its influence became the bohemians, occultists and experimenters of the Roaring Twenties. The French Surrealists were predominantly born under the influence of Uranus.

If people born between 1940 and 1952 can be called the **Children of the Atomic Age**, and those born between 1953 and 1963 are the **Children of the Space Age**, we can refer to the generation born between 1969 and 1978 as the Uranians as much as we can refer to them as the **Children of the Computer Age** (or even **Latter-phase Generation X**).

But perhaps **Children of the Night** is a better appelation. Anne Rice's novels of the bisexual, incestuous Vampire Lestat are popular reading among today's teenagers. This popularity has rekindled interest in vampires, vampirism, and the darker side of eros. For most young women reading Rice's novels, Lestat is a Romantic Byronesque character, the same effect that Bela Lugosi and Christopher Lee had on their respective audiences in the Thirties and Sixties playing Dracula. The vampire is one of our most enduring modern myths, and the most popular, according to Norine Dresser in her work, **American Vampires: Fans, Victims, Practitioners** (1990 Vintage Books).

The book is a sociological study of the modern folk lore surrounding vampires. Why are they popular? How do they remain so popular? Today, many young people are influenced not only by Dracula, but by Seventies TV soap opera **Dark Shadows** vampire, Barnabas Collins, and now Lestat. But beyond dressing up in Vampire Drag, or forming fan clubs around vampire movies, TV shows or books (like those of Science Fiction or Comic Fandom), some young people take vampirism seriously – very seriously.

The rise of the Gothic movement in music reflects a fascination with B-Grade horror films, all-black clothing, the post-modern images of death and decay for post-Auschwitz generations. Here modern teenage vampires have found a musical and cultural haven.

Onyx is a seventeen-year-old female high-school student in Edmonton; Drago is a nineteen-year-old male who just finished grade twelve. Both of them are Vampires. For obvious reasons they don't use their real names. Though their friends are 'into' vampires, these two consider themselves real vampires – Children of the Night. Neither Onyx or Drago have met; they were interviewed separately. However, they share a similar outlook on what being a vampire is all about, although they do have their differences.

[An Editorial AIDS Alert – It's the '90s! Play Safe! Use Condoms or Die! —BF]

Eugene W. Plawiuk: When did you get into vampirism?

Onyx: About five years ago, when I was twelve. It was a gradual progression, and I really got into it. It became a part of me—which happens to everything I'm interested in. I've always liked vampire movies, and I've enjoyed their presence in the literary world – though I've never been able to read an entire vampire novel. I have my own preconcieved ideas about what vampires are. I'm not into vampire stories as much as the very concept of being a vampire.

Drago: I've always liked horror movies, and I started taking it seriously in grade ten. I read **Interview with the Vampire** by Anne Rice and I loved the romance of the characters – Lestat was so sensual.

EWP: What is a vampire, and what makes you one?

O: LIterally, the archetype is undead, incredibly old, needs blood, can't stand the sun, has long teeth. The kind I consider myself to be is a bit different. I'm pale naturally; I don't like the sun, but I can stand it. I need the taste of blood, and blood itself. I get turned on by the thought of drinking the life-force of someone or something. I've always eaten raw or rare meat.

At thirteen I found that I needed to taste blood. I cut myself by accident, and in retrospect, when I'd finished sucking, I found I'd consumed more blood than usual. I never did it on purpose; self-mutilation was never the point.

D: The vampire is youth – the power of the imagination, the experience of prolonged youth. But, I don't believe in this living forever shit. When I started getting into my vampire self I started looking for antique clothing, jewelry and relics to wear. It's a different attitude being a vampire: you take risks. You get into taking chances, especially to get rid of social or sexual repression. I find myself taking on vampire traits, like gestures, hand motions and body and head movements, when watching vampire movies or reading. I feel I get increased mental powers when I assume my vampire self, and after all these years I've really gotten into the role. To me, the vampire is romantic and romance has died in this age.

I also feel a change between my day self and my night self. Other people notice it too; I get more respect, almost fear, at night.

EWP: What turns you on about blood: is it a sexual need?

O: No, its not sexual, it's more like eating a tasty burger or drinking a glass of fine wine. I don't need to have it, so it's not an addiction. I found that I have a vampire cycle, *which has nothing to do with the moon; it* happens irregularly. One day, about a month ago, I got frazzled and confused. I had horrible pains in my body, and wandered around, not making sense to myself or others, when I realized I needed blood. It's probably psychosomatic, but it works. The literary vampire is very sexual and romanticized.

When people find out I like to drink

blood, they think I'm either fucked up or putting them on. But for people like myself: You are who you are. It's the same as being straight or gay or bi, it's a portion of your life. I don't like the word 'victim' either; it gives people like me a bad rap. I don't consider it sexual, it's a need, and if I take blood from someone else, it's because of a cut or an accident. I never take blood forcibly; it would be like rape. I'm not doing this to get attention; it's for my own enjoyment. It seems wasteful if someone is bleeding to daub it with a hanky when I could have it. Some of my friends, who are into vampires, let me take it from them – it's kind of sad.

D: Like Victorian vampires, I have abnormal tastes that I pursue. I find blood erotic. Especially the sight, rather than the taste, though I love to bite and get bitten. To see someone bleed, especially in vampires movies, is a real turn-on. I got a real 'woody' the first time I saw a vampire movie, and the blood trickled down the female victim's neck.

EWP: Do you draw blood when you bite?

D: No, my teeth aren't sharp enough, though I wish they would pierce skin. I've considered artificial fangs, but I don't want them sticking in my gums or lips, and I don't like the way they distort the mouth. I only need to sharpen my canines a bit. Instead I use a small knife; I like incisions – to cut someone. I did it to a friend the other night, and he didn't know I'd cut his arm until the next morning. At the time he was really into it. I do like to drink other people's blood, and if I get cut, I'll drink my own.

EWP: Do you see vampirism as a form of sado-masochism?

D: Definitely. I like props, tools and ritualistic sexual play. My victims are sexual conquests. I like creating scenes, and I like to lead people on. I prefer to be submissive, but I have to be dominant first. I like to violate and be violated, but it depends on the company I'm with.

It makes me feel more alive when I play the dominant vampire role. Seeing beauty everywhere: watching time slow down to avoid the rat-race that everyone gets into. I'm not easily satisfied anymore. I have a lot of different, decadent tastes; I need variety.

I like to establish fear – I get power from it, but I don't terrorize my victims: I'm too nice. It's a stimulus in my head. If I can't get it in bed, I'll use my vampire role in a social setting. I'm always conscious of controlling my environment..

EWP: Aren't you worried about AIDS?

O: I don't, but I guess I should, though I know my friends. I don't fear death either; I've seen my family members die. All the men in my family are dead; only the women survived.

D: No. I'm cautious, but it doesn't affect me. I don't have a conscious fear of AIDS, or death. I used to fear death when I was younger and bored. You have to be bored with life to be afraid of death. I love living, even if I die tomorrow.

EWP: I notice you're both pale, naturally or with make-up, and wear a lot of black. Is this a conscious part of the vampire persona?

O: I got into wearing black when I hung around artsy types. But it looks good on my family: it looks good on me, so I don't have any coloured clothing, only dark colours like purple. I'm genetically pale, so I like to wear pale make-up, not because I fancy myself a vampire, but because of the contrast with the black clothing. I don't like to tan and I like being pale. I'm vain.

D: Wearing black, you aren't as noticeable to people; you blend into the shadows. Black is a colour of power. With all this Satanic hysteria shit going on people think it's malicious, but to me it's just a veil. In black, I am a different entity than anyone who is unveiled. I like antique clothing as well, because it looks like funeral garb [Drago is wearing a set of formal evening wear from the turn of the century]. You could say that I'm in mourning for everything, and revelling in all possibilities at the same time.

I wear pale make-up for 'effect'. It's a personal form of vanity to appear in the typical vampire image, especially at night. Wearing pale make-up accentuates your lips; they're very red and people have to look at you: they are drawn in and repulsed.

Lots of people wear all black for fashion or fad. Black costuming comes and goes, but mine is permanent. It's part of the vampire persona that I've integrated into myself. And as part of my vampire self, it goes beyond clothes because I'm constantly changing. I don't have any real coloured clothes, most of them are black.

EWP: What kind of music, movies or authors do you like?

D: I'd love to go to Los Angeles and experience one of the last places the Gothic Movement exists in North America. I see vampires as part of the Gothic cultur still big in Europe, and a few parts (U.S., but we aren't seeing the kind of that happened a few years ago. It die in Edmonton: now the big thing is House shit.

Some of my favourite band **Cabaret Voltaire**, **Diamanda G** **Copernicus** and **The Cure**. Music wi eerie edge that reflects a dark romanti Movies I like are the same: **The Vai Lovers**, **Children of the Corn**, **The Hı** and **The Rocky Horror Picture Sh** which isn't about vampires *per se*; flects the vampire lifestyle without saying so. It's very sensual and dark. the end of sexual repression that **R Horror** represents. I liked Norine Dre book on modern vampires and fans; I lot of addresses from it that I hope to to soon. Other authors are: Anne Ri course, de Sade and Aleister Crowley working with Crowley's system of m and adapting some of the rituals myse the purpose of enhancing my vampire It's very effective. I've incorporated a magickal material into my vampirism. **The Book of the Law**, I see the Goc Nuit as my Vampire Mother. I've co long way in the last two years.

—Eugene W. Plawiuk



If we watch a friend drowning we do not notice the exquisite curve made by his body as he falls into the water, nor the play of sunlight on the ripples as he disappears below the surface; we should be inhuman, æsthetic fiends if we did.
—J.E. Harrison,
Ancient Art and Ritual

I Sing The Body Dismembered

Dario Argento's Dance of Death



Tonight (and it is night), we will discuss the films of Dario Argento. Here is a man who specializes in confusing the issue: he disorients his audience intellectually with twisting, almost obscenely convoluted plots, and he unbalances us on the (cursed be the word) 'moral' plane by constantly shifting ground and point of view, creating a world where the only moral absolute is the pleasing æsthetics of murder. And finally, of course, he shocks the hell out of us with some of the most frightening, upsetting films this side of a knife to the groin.

One of the keys to Argento's æsthetic is the use he makes of his actors. A Dario Argento film is not, generally speaking, an actor's showcase. The players are not so much characters as they are tools or puppets for the director to move about and slice to ribbons as he sees fit. Performances lean toward the rudimentary. Some of the blame must be laid on the atrocious dubbing that usually plagues these films, but even the characters played by English-speaking actors of some stature (Jennifer Connelly, Jessica Harper, David Hemmings) are brushed in with fairly simple, brief strokes. This is in large part due to the fact that Argento is only interested in the aspects of his people's lives that project

into the surreal world of chaos and horror that he creates.

This claustrophobic environment is one of the great differences between Argento and more conventional horror practitioners. One of the dominant patterns of the genre goes something like this: characters move from Place A (representing the Safe World of Sunny Rationa ism) to Place B (Bad News), which is usually hermetically sealed off from Place A. If the characters could return to A, they would be safe. Unfortunately, they can only reach A by cleansing B of the bad news. To use a simplistic (or at least simple-minded) example, Crystal Lake in the **Friday the 13th** series is Place B, and civilization is Place A. In Argento's films, there is no Place A. Virtually all the murders occur in the victim's own homes. **Inferno** (1980) pushes this paranoid world-view to its extreme, as characters are slaughtered by the minions of the Three Mothers in Rome and New York simultaneously, regardless of where they happen to be. The forces of evil know no boundaries. The entire world is Place B, and your home is actually your murderer's.



By reducing his characters to what are essentially thumbnail sketches (fleshed out with little touches here and there), and by placing these people in a totally hostile universe, Argento achieves two important effects. With the help of virtuoso cinematography, the settings of the films become as much characters as the flesh and blood that dies in them. This is nowhere as evident as in **Suspiria** (1977) and (most spectacularly) as **Inferno**'s apartment building glowers over its street with its windows lit up like so many red eyes. It blasts noxious fumes down its ventilator shafts at Leigh McLoskey, knocking him out, and then appears to lock its own doors, forcing Daria Nicolodi up into its attic where she is set upon by cats and then stabbed to death. Hideous laughter echoes down the piping. The voice, never identified, might well belong to the building itself. At the climax of the film, not only is the semi-sentience of the building confirmed, but the equation of the inanimate with the animate is made explicit.

McLoskey discovers the wheelchair-bound and mute architect of the building. With the help of an artificial larynx, the architect gives this telling speech: "This building has become my body: its bricks my cells, its passageways my veins, and its horror my very heart."

By having his people and his things equal or even indistinguishable, Argento achieves his second major effect: the standards for beauty are warped. "My room is really pretty," says Jessica Harper of her flatmate's apartment with the Escheresque wallpaper in **Suspiria**. Beautiful the set is indeed, but it is not a beautiful *apartment.* the flatmate, in this scene, is so decked out as to be overpoweringly glamourous. And yet, her baroqueness is so similar to the background that if she didn't move, she might well disappear. We are shown one form of beauty, and told that something else is also beautiful. Both forms are present in the same shot. The living woman becomes as much a piece of artifice as the inanimate wall behind her.

Argento pushes the animate-inanimate connection to its logical extreme: people's bodies are subject to the same kind of physical manipulation as any other artistic material. Hence the deliriously elegant murders that are the set-pieces of his films. The double murder that occurs barely five minutes into **Suspiria** is one of the most beautiful acts of violence in cinema. The victims are clad in white, standing out against the garish red and blue of the sets, but dwarfed by the Art Deco architecture. The murderer thrusts a knife into the body of a young girl with the manner of a painter daubing a canvas. **Goblin**'s thunderous score punctuates each stabbing, and a lingering synthesizer note induces a feeling of awe as a stained-glass, eye-like skylight explodes under the weight of one victim. The glass flies toward the camera and is shown a few seconds later to have impaled a second victim. The entire scene is structured like the sex act: the repetitive knife thrusts, growing ever more savage (the last one, significantly, plunges straight into the beating heart); the rhythmic, ear-splitting drum beat; the orgasmic release as the glass explodes; and in the afterglow, a momentary return of the pounding music as the camera glides at a leisurely pace across the floor to stare at spilled blood and an impaled corpse.

Argento is very aware of the erotic component in his murders:

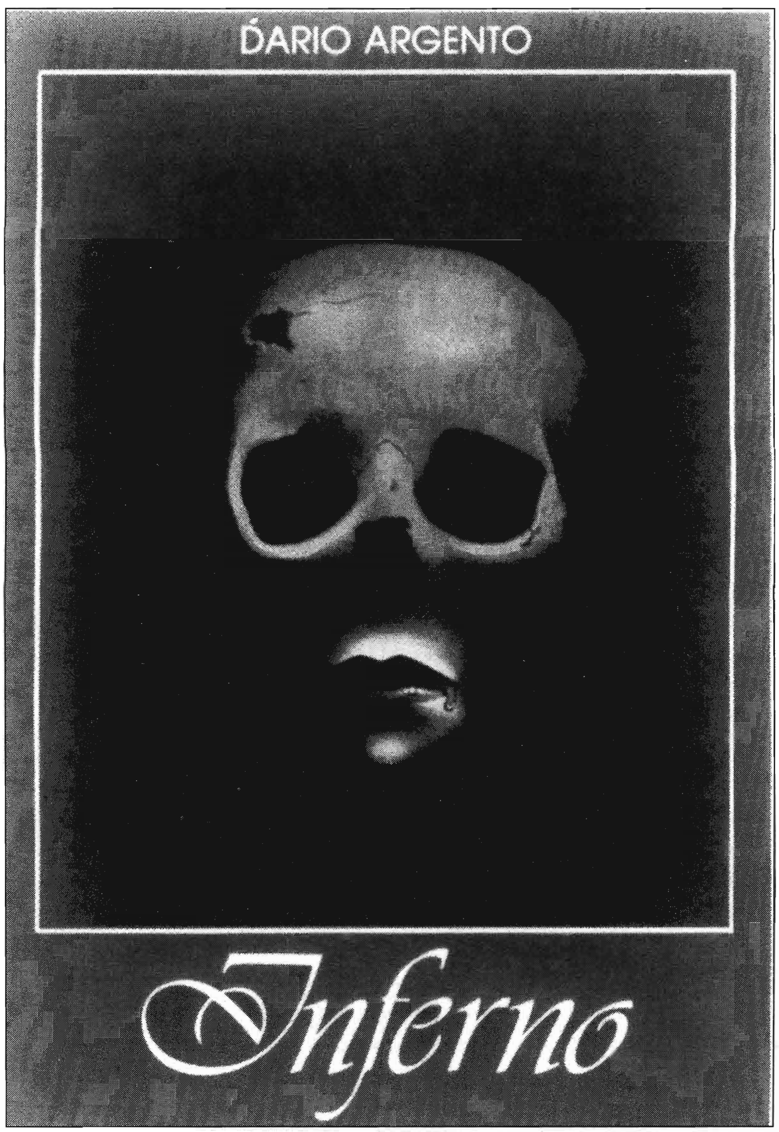
> *In such an intense physical act as murder, between the victim and the*

murderer there is something sensual, something erotic deep down. There is something, of course it is not developed all the way, but there is something that ties the two acts, that is, the erotic and the bloody one. The knife, for example, is phallic, which we all know, and therefore the link between the two orgasms. The death orgasm and the sexual one. (Soavi 1985)

Furthermore, in discussing the relationship between the psychopath in **Opera** and the object of his affections (who is tied up and forced to watch murders), he says "the murderer needs her to see it all as her enforced restraint will bring the ultimate orgasm – the perpetration of death being the clearest act of love" (Feren, 1989, 52).

Suspiria is not Argento's only work to provide scenes of breathtakingly beautiful violence. In **Inferno**, the stabbing of Gabriele Lavia and Eleanora Giorgi is choreographed to the "*Va Penserio*" movement of Verdi's **Nabucco**. The sequence is taken into the realm of nightmare as the action building up to the murders is intercut with totally disconnected scenes of a gloved hand cutting off the heads of paper dolls, a lizard eating a moth, and an unknown girl being hung. In **Opera**, we are treated to the sight of a bullet, in extreme close-up and slow motion, plowing through a peephole like a locomotive to pierce Daria Nicolodi's eye and come out the back of her head.

Argento backs up the unsettling notions of fusing murder and beauty, and of the body as artist's material to be bent, folded, spindled and mutilated at will by creating collages of two totally dissimilar media: human flesh and broken glass. In virtually every one of his films, soft, pliable, living flesh is forced to occupy the same space as jagged, rigid, inanimate (and utterly inimical) glass. Both break as they meet, to form a new creation. The completed tableau is a most disturbing still life.



Argento's unorthodox sense of æsthetics has made him the target of harsh condemnation, as well as the recipient of high praise. The most common accusation is that his films display a nasty streak of misogyny. Certainly Argento didn't help anything when he made the following statement:

I like women, especially beautiful ones. If they have a good face and figure, I would much prefer to watch them being murdered than an ugly girl or a man. I certainly don't have to justify myself to anyone about this. I don't care what anybody thinks or reads into it. I have often had journalists walk out of interviews when I say what I feel about this subject. (Newman, 1988, 105)

It is difficult to say to what degree one should take this utterance at face value, or how much Argento is playing *agent provocateur*. The films themselves offer conflicting evidence. Beautiful women are made to suffer grotesquely baroque deaths. By using actresses remarkable for their beauty, Argento manages to deify and desecrate his women simultaneously. The locus of evil resides, more often than not, in women, who in this case are generally dark mother figures.[1]

But these are Argento movies, so nothing is that simple and convenient. In **Tenebrae**, Anthony Franciosa plays a writer who specializes in *giallo*, the genre of psycho-thriller initiated in the movies of Mario Bava and given definitive form by Argento. Franciosa's character is confronted by a female reporter, and the following exchange takes place:

*Reporter: **Tenebrae** is a sexist novel. Why do you despise women so much?*
Franciosa: I don't think it's sexist.
Reporter: Women as victims, as ciphers. The male heroes with their hairy macho bullshit.
Franciosa: You've known me for ten years. You know I don't hate women.
Reporter: Look, I'm talking about your work.
Franciosa: Well, I don't know. Would you like me to tell you I supported the Equal Rights Amendment?
Reporter: Okay, so explain the book.

Franciosa is left speechless and floundering. At the end of the film, he is revealed to be a psychopath. We could be witnessing a confession, or Argento could be seizing the accusations hurled at him and using them to undercut his audience still further by questioning *their* motives for watching these films. And while in one interview (in **Dario Argento's World of Horror**) a puzzled-sounding Argento comments that the



audience seems to like his killers, for he states elsewhere that "I don't like the serial killer. I hate this person" (Gore, 1989, 57).

I believe that a question that should be asked is whether these films are not so much misogynist as **misanthropist** (a crucial distinction). And if we examine Argento's male characters, we find that they are, virtually without exception, either impotent (in every sense of the word: sexually, physically, mentally, or powerless to alter events) or evil – when they aren't both. They are often executed with dismissive contempt, as when Jennifer Connelly's guardian in **Phenomena**, having been set up as a probable rescuer, is decapitated the instant he arrives on the scene.[2] They are killed with just as much savagery as the female characters, and in scenes that often go on much longer (heads and hands are frequently bashed and broken bloodily before the stabbings begin). In this light, the following quotation is quite revelatory:

> *As far as my first film, **The Bird with the Crystal Plumage** goes, the lead was Tony Musante. Apart from the fact that I didn't like him much, he was very distant from me. I considered him as I consider fish in an aquarium, as somebody with whom you don't have any rapport whatsoever, apart from necessities. From the beginning, I imagined him between two glass doors as if he were a prisoner in an aquarium.* (Soavi, 1985)

In fact, Argento quite frequently casts leads he has no sympathy for, and these are often in the mould of the stereotypical male hero (though with the slight twist of usually being writers or musicians. This trait, however, is also true of his female leads).

Particularly notable is the systematic undermining of the David Hemmings character in **Deep Red.** Having raised the hackles of reporter Daria Nicolodi[3] by speaking dismissively of "all that woman stuff" (i.e. feminism), he reluctantly agrees to prove his assertions of masculine superiority by means of an arm-wrestle. Nicolodi (debatably) cheats the first time around, and wins by cheating the second time, but **only** after Hemmings quite visibly cheats himself at the start of the second round. Reduced to utter childishness, Hemmings stalks off in a snit, watched by an amused Nicolodi. Not too long afterwards, an unconscious Hemmings is carried from a burning house by the unflappable Nicolodi (who had been instructed to stay away from the Dangerous Male World of Adventure and Intrigue).

If nothing else, Argento is even-handed in dishing out punishment for humankind. In **Opera**, he clearly includes himself as a target for his bloody executions. The film is a dark exploration of the sado-maso-voyeuristic relationship that exists between filmmaker and audience, and is quite simply the most disturbing metafilm ever made, including Michael Powell's **Peeping Tom** (1960). It operates on so many levels at once (many of them steeped in total psycho-sexual delirium) that one hardly knows which way to turn. **Opera**'s importance to the matter at hand lies in its treatment of the Ian Charleson character. He's a horror film director directing an opera. His cutting dialogue marks him as a surrogate for Argento, particularly

in the following three instances:

1) In answer to the detective's insinuating comment that as a horror film maker, Charleson should be an expert on murder: "I think it's unwise to use movies as a guide for reality."

"That depends on what you mean by reality," says the detective (who moonlights as a psychopath).

2) Cristina Marsillach mentions that film people are reputed to have overactive libidos. Charleson, with dead-pan sarcasm, replies that it's true. "I always jerk off before I shoot a scene."

3) Charleson's girlfriend, on his cold-blooded reaction to the murders: "This turns you on. You're a sadist. Everyone who knows you tells me the same thing."

Charleson: "Must be boring for you."

The identification between the director outside the artistic frame with the one within is reinforced when we see Charleson, in Switzerland, filming a bee kept before his camera by means of a tiny leash. This is precisely the technique Argento used to film a bee in Switzerland in his previous film (**Phenomena**). Barely two minutes later, Charleson is stabbed to death in extreme close-up. This would be disturbing enough, but when we consider the fact that it is Argento who actually performs all the murders in his films, then we realize that we have just witnessed a metaphoric suicide.

Opera is, in many respects, the climax to Argento's dance of death. Its very title signals that this dark æsthetic is the very heart and soul of the film. The dance reaches such a level of frenzy that the lord of the dance himself is caught up and dragged into the thanatic orgy. Where Argento will (or can) go from here remains to be seen. His latest effort is "The Black Cat", one of two stories in **Two Evil Eyes** (the other story is "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar", directed by his friend George Romero). Strangely unreleased, the film reportedly marks Argento's attempt to reach a wider audience, and he has apparently cut back on his stylistic excesses. Whether or not this effort is a sell-out does not alter the fact that in his past work, most particularly **Suspiria**, **Inferno** and **Opera**, Dario Argento has given us visions of a dark, sadean, deliriously beautiful world that future film makers will find very difficult to surpass.

—David Annandale

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Notes

1 – This image is taken to the limit in **Inferno**, where Death is incarnate as the Mother of Sighs, the Mother of Tears, and, most centrally, the Mother of Darkness. Argento takes his creatures from De Quincey's **Suspiria de Profundis**, but significantly changes their original appellation from the Three **Sisters** to the Three **Mothers** of Sorrow.

2 – This pattern (Macho Protector Killed Within Minutes of Appearance) occurs twice in **Phenomena**, and turns up again in **Inferno**, **Tenebrae** and **Opera**.

3 – Nicolodi is probably the most fascinating player in Argento's films. She has collaborated with him on every film from **Deep Red** through **Opera**, either as actress or, in the case of **Suspiria**, as co-screenwriter (with a Hitchcock-style cameo at the beginning). They were also married for a time. Visually, she is a true chameleon, as we see her sophisticated and professional in **Deep Red**, glamourous in **Tenebrae** and **Opera**, plain and grey in **Phenomena**, and ethereally beautiful in **Inferno**. Her meatiest role, however, is the lead in Mario Bava's harrowing Œdipal ghost story, **Shock** (**Suspense-Transfer-Hypnos**) (1977), released domestically as **Beyond the Door II**.

Meme Implant Safe

Canadian Medical Association Says

Canadian Press Ottawa (Nov.2, 1991)– Meme implants are safe and do not need to be removed, the Canadian Medical Association says in a report published yesterday.

David Boynes, chairman of a CMA medical review panel, had said on Thursday that the risk of cancer from the meme is infinitesimal – about five cancers per ten million subjects, each with two implants. Previous statistics varied wildly, with some media reports based on interviews with U.S. scientists putting the risk of cancer from the implants as high as one in two hundred.

Dr. Boyes said that the panel's review of data shows that the controversy has been overblown by emotional accusations and very little scientific data. "I think those who have [Meme implants] should be reassured that the chance of getting cancer is vanishingly small," he said. "It's there. There is a carcinogenic that is released when body fluids react with [the Meme], but it's such a minute amount, the risk is very small."

However, Dr. Boyes said, the panel recommends that more studies be done on the Meme's safety, as well as on implants in general.

The panel was struck by federal Health Minister Benoît Bouchard after the U.S. manufacturer of the Meme pulled its product from the market in April. Its recommendations were published in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal.*

About 200,000 people, including 17,000 in Canada, have received the implants.

American Psycho

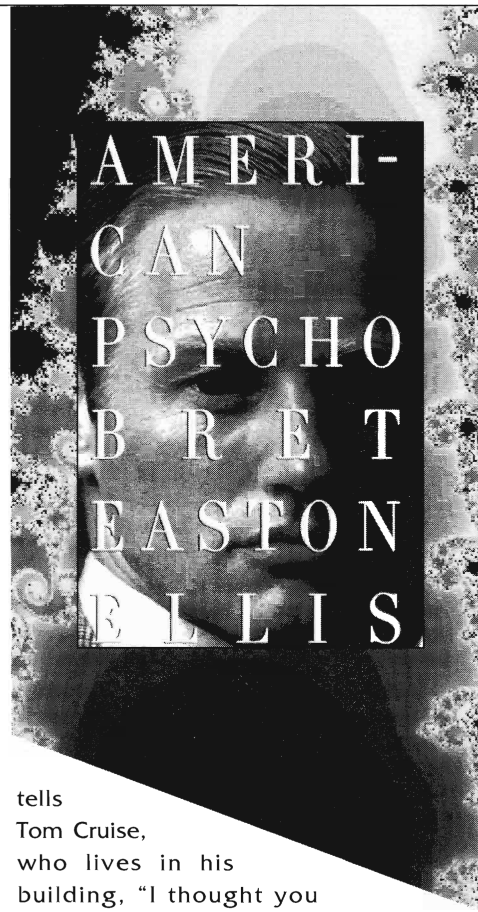
by Brett Easton Ellis

New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 1991, 399 pp.

American Psycho is structured as a one-way descent into hell, opening with the words "Abandon Hope All Ye Who Enter Here," and ending with "This Is Not An Exit." Hell, for Ellis, is synonymous with the postmodern condition: reality has become a collection of surfaces rather than depths, and further, those surfaces are fragmented beyond repair. The 'hero' and narrator of **American Psycho**, Pat Bateman, embodies these qualities. Much of it reads like a catalogue of chic brand names – the stuff of which the modern world is made – as Bateman obsessively describes the clothes worn by the people around him, and the restaurants and clubs they frequent. The point Ellis tries to make is that the overdose of product specificity leads to the anonymity of those who consume the products. Bateman and his friends continually get each other's names wrong, **because they all look (and think) alike**. The characters are reduced to different combinations of a limited set of product labels, and when those combinations are on occasion identical, the people are, for all intents and purposes, identical as well.

The reason Ellis places Bateman (the psycho) into this ultra-yuppie world is that the structural principle of that world is essentially the same as that of the pornographies of sex and violence: all are based on the combinations and permutations of a limited set of factors. There is no need for a coherent plot, because like all other pornography, it consists solely of variations on the same basic themes. This is also the reason pornography is ultimately boring: you can only fuck, kill, or dress a person in so many different ways. Bateman's actions become more extreme (and his grip on sanity more tenuous) as he searches desperately for as-yet-untried combinations of sex and death. The fact that Ellis managed to get the **Fangoria** book review boys all hot and wet is, I suppose, a testimony to his success in articulating novel ways to fuck'n'snuff folks. But is it art?

If Ellis is to be condemned for this book, it shouldn't be on moral grounds. Bateman is a heavily ironized character; he



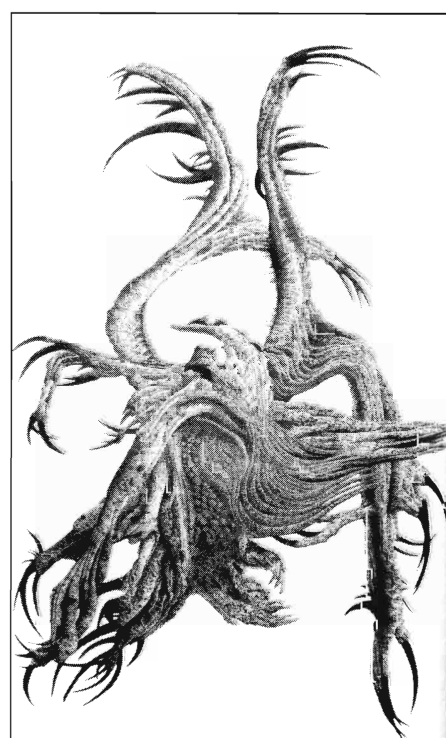
tells Tom Cruise, who lives in his building, "I thought you were very fine in **Bartender**. I thought it was quite a good movie, and **Top Gun** too." (p.71) He continually gets facts and names wrong, especially when rhapsodizing about his musical faves, **Whitney Houston**, **Genesis**, and **Huey Lewis** (which **is** worse, mass murder or Whitney Houston's second album?). Consequently, Bateman's relentless misanthropy, misogyny and homophobia can be seen as part of the same horribly distorted worldview. The problem with **American Psycho** is that its length (399 pages) is an insult to the intelligence of the reader (as are the various passages where Bateman soliloquizes about what a horrible, hollow person he is – like I hadn't noticed. Ellis doesn't trust his readers enough to avoid spoonfeeding them). I don't buy the argument that excess is precisely the point for the following reason: Ellis could have easily made his point in a short story or novella form, but that wouldn't have made him as much money as a big, thick, glossy novel. Ellis is very close to becoming that which he criticizes: a brand name (by the way, his photo on the back cover is disturbingly – deliberately? – similar to the one on the front, presumably of Bateman). **Less Than Zero**, his first book, was (to paraphrase William Gibson) all Edge: witty, articulate, short, fast, and dangerous. **American Psycho** is big and flabby, like a young boxer gotten old, fat and stupid, but still riding on his reputation and making money he doesn't deserve from commercial endorsements. What twentysomethings have to think long and hard about is whether Ellis, one of our self-proclaimed spokespeople, has sold us out in the worst and most literal of ways.

—DWH

On the other hand, I really enjoyed the thing: however I admit to an admiration of the grotesque. That said, I didn't find it long, and I laughed out loud a few times. Still, it's not for every taste.

The secondary joy of **American Psycho** is objectifying the work. Turn it into a symbolic object, and you don't even have to read it. Just carry all 399 pages proudly under your arm (as you wander aimlessly around town, stopping for coffee every few hours, but **really** looking for work). You'll love the conversations [debates? rants? arguments? ...] with people who heard about the book and are horrified that it exists. And of course, they wouldn't dream of exposing themselves to the putrid vapours emanating from within its rank pages, but they'll debate ya anyway!.

—BF



TURBULENT IRONIES

(Writing on [Womack Writing) on Womack Writing]



"Sex. Drugs. Violence. Rock and roll," said the Old Man, raising his glass. "Something for everyone."

—Jack Womack, **Ambient** (p.96)

In **Turbulent Mirror: An Illustrated Guide to Chaos Theory and the Science of Wholeness**, John Briggs and F. David Peat describe what they refer to as "the irony of turbulence":

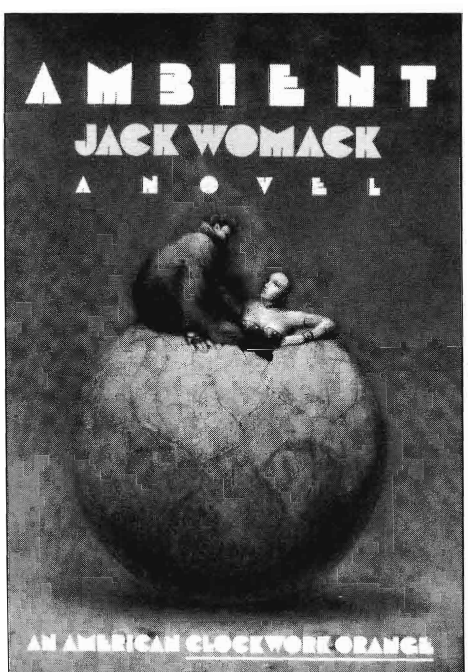
> *Turbulence [originally thought to be merely "mindless jiggling"[1]] arises because all the pieces of a movement are connected to each other, any piece of the action depending on the other pieces, and the feedback between the pieces producing still more pieces.*
>
> *Is the breakup of order into turbulence – that strange attractor – a sign of the system's infinitely deep interconnectedness? In fact, of its wholeness? Strange as it may seem, there is evidence that points in this direction.* (p.52)

Reading the fiction of Jack Womack involves coming to terms with the textual equivalent of the irony of turbulence. In his three SF novels to date (**Ambient**, **Terraplane**, and **Heathern**), bizarre characters speaking strange argots move through a labyrinthine series of interrelations with such rapidity that it would be easy to dismiss his work as so much sound and fury. Involving, as it does, gnostic mutants, a parallel world, Messiahs true and false, an almost omniscient AI named Alice, the birth of a post-literate nation, a filing cabinet that contains the traces of a mindbogglingly huge conspiracy to hide the truth about **everything** (who really shot JFK, who paid Christ's salary, what happened to Amelia Earhart and Judge Crater, the only complete copy of **Greed** – on videocassette, no less), the rise of lowlife drug smugglers to the world of high finance – and I could, of course, go on – his fictional world can appear as hostile and purposeless to a potential reader as it does to the characters on the pages. However,

Womack (if you ask him) will be the first to assert that he knows exactly what he's doing. His work appears chaotic because it is **structured** to appear that way; all the seemingly disparate pieces of his textual web are fundamentally interconnected.

Further, that chaotic structure (in a world of turbulent irony, oxymorons are unavoidable) serves a definite purpose. The prose of **Ambient** et al. is less akin to sound and fury than **The Sound and the Fury**, a novel (by another Southerner, perhaps not incidentally) which uses unconventional language and plot structures for the same purpose: to message, not massage, the reader. "A massaging or readerly text will affirm values we already have and thus leave us undisturbed, while a writerly and messaging text will in some way disrupt our settled expectations" (Hughes p.59).

Like the cyberpunk writers with whom he is so often compared, Womack is a *bricoleur*. He turns goods stolen from the shelves of what Tom Maddox calls the "semiotic supermarket" of twentieth century cultural symbols into the stuff of his art.[2] However, it is important to note that the use of *bricolage* does not preclude care in the construction of the text; this is evident from the subtle and intricate internal structures that Womack's individual books possess (if you're not a fan of subtle and intricate internal structures, there's always lots of killing and hitting people to keep you occupied. I've always wanted to do a body



count in **Ambient**, but haven't worked up the nerve yet). This careful structuring is especially evident in **Heathern**, his latest novel (which actually precedes **Ambient** and **Terraplane** in the chronology of the overall story). It opens with a savagely ironic parody of the descent of a Messiah into the world, a descent that results immediately in one (and almost two) deaths, instead of the promise of eternal life:

> *A baby almost killed me as I walked to work one morning. By passing beneath a bus shelter's roof at the ordained moment I lived to tell my tale. With strangers surrounding me I looked at what remained. Laughter from heaven made us lift our eyes skyward. The baby's mother lowered her arms and leaned out the window. Without applause her audience drifted off, seeking crumbs in the gutters of this city of God. Xerox shingles covered the shelter's remaining glass pane, and the largest read:*
>
> *Want to be crucified. Have own nails. Leave message on machine.*
>
> *The fringe of numbers along the ad's hem had been stripped away.* (**Heathern**, p.1)

A similar passage at the end of the book brings the narrative full circle. Joanna, the narrator, attempts to take a dry dive from an office tower only to realize that, ironically, **she** is the Messiah.[3] The language of other passages in the text points relentlessly toward this final moment: "Soon enough, I believed – wanted to believe – I would fly away from it all, not knowing how, not knowing when" (p.11); "as if, having been pitched from heaven into space's floorless pit, I realized too late that not even the stars would keep me company" (p.122); "I recalled coming across a paragraph concerning Waldo Frank as I idly flipped pages ... Frank believed that when the messiah came the messiah would come as a woman." (p.71)

I don't want to convey the notion that Womack leaves everything tied up neatly; as the chaos of his texts is ordered, the order of his texts is chaotic, i.e. the overall pattern of the series remains, for me at least, opaque. More than anything else, this is due to a lack of information (turbulence was written off as 'mere' chaos until the advent of supercomputers and graphic modelling allowed scientists to examine different aspects of the whole[4] [Maybe what I need to get the Big Picture is better hardware ... would a computerized textual analysis help?]).

Waiting for the answer (which may never come) to this textual puzzle is entirely fitting, though: Womack is (as another aspect of his chaotic, ironic turbulence) fractal, self-similar; a writer of infinite deferral. There are, evidently, systems and/or gods that run his fictional world, but their methods and goals remain, for the time being, inscrutable. Both his readers and characters are left waiting for the Messiah, who is invariably false (at worst) or flawed (at best). Yet they (the representatives of hope) keep coming, warts and all, the products of an infinite assembly line staffed by blind idiot gods. Hope is one of the strongest attractor points[5] in Womack's turbulent texts, because it is essential for the characters to have some reason to continue in a fragmented postmodern world that makes no sense. Every major Womack character has to find some way of continuing after becoming aware of some massive internal schism; to fail to do so is to die spiritually (if not physically). Surviving and continuing to hope is the only viable option. Sort of like the real world.

The title of his forthcoming book, **Elvissey**, would suggest an odyssey in search of yet another potential messiah (guess who) in the turbulent mirror-world that lies beyond the Flushing Window (hints of Alice in Wonderland here - remember the name of the AI mentioned earlier). Godness only knows what repercussions **that** will bring about; when Stalin's double crosses between worlds in **Terraplane**, he brings with him an unknown viral epidemic that takes countless lives; "Even in Russia it was a matter of greatest humor that only the Big Boy could have killed millions of his countryfolk during two different centuries" (p.225). Again, like the characters in the book, we can hardly/only wait.

I met Jack Womack at the "Word on the Street" festival in Toronto, and, happily, he agreed to answer some of my questions about his work. He writes, "I am very glad to be offered the chance to clear some of these matters up, as there appears to be (certainly among traditional literary/science fiction critics) some misunderstanding as to

what I'm doing." You've read my ideas about his writing; what follows are (unexpurgated) his own words. Enjoyment's mandatoried.

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Darren Wershler-Henry: The titles of your books – **Ambient**, **Terraplane**, and the forthcoming **Elvissey** – all have their referents in the domain of pop music. Do you listen to music when you write as a kind of "atmospheric aid?" Again, from your choice of titles, it's probably safe to assume that you listen to Robert Johnson, Elvis, Fripp and Eno, but do your tastes extend into punk, hardcore, thrash, industrial or cold wave? The reason I ask is that so many of the writers whose work directly inspires contemporary musicians are not interested in this type of music at all ...[6]

Jack Womack: I do listen to music while I write, often; as often I'll have music playing and the television turned on with the volume mercifully lowered, to see what sort of blend emerges. As to what I listen to depends on what sort of mood I wish to be carried over into the book. During the writing of **Heathern** I listened predominantly to a number of women vocalists and choral recording of Thomas Tallis; while working on **Terraplane** I listened to Robert Johnson, certainly, but as well to Vaughn Williams, Elgar, the Benny Goodman Band performance of "Sing, Sing, Sing" at Carnegie Hall in 1938, and Charles Ives. During the time I worked on **Ambient** I kept a number of things playing – Sex Pistols (my model for the Ambient band seen playing early on; the tune in question being "Holidays in the Sun"), MTV (which, in 1983, we'd just gotten here in New York, or at least I'd just gotten, and which at the time seemed both more promising and more ominous than it has hence proved to be), Elvis and, certainly to run as a rhythm track for the first chapter, a piece from Robert Fripp/Andy Summers's album **I Advance Masked** (title cut) – that piece's beat was exactly the one I aimed to match in the text.

I have always liked much punk, hardcore, etc., though I don't get to clubs much and of course the most interesting things I hear I never hear on radio. There is an industrial/thrash/art band here in New York called Black Rain to whom I serve as one of several literary mentors, so to speak, and I enjoy their music – they're rather intense.

DWH: What about rap, which is, in a lot of ways, the real music of postmodernism?

JW: As to rap, I certainly agree as to its importance though of course, now that it's being looked upon as socially acceptable the quality is rapidly going downhill. Two sidebars of possible interest: in the scene in **Ambient** where O'Malley and Avalon are on the subway I toyed with the idea of the motorman making all announcements in rap (but didn't – though what had put the idea in my head was hearing an actual NYC subway motorman actually doing it about a year earlier); in **Terraplane** I make Luther remember how his fellow Caucasian students were forever attempting to remind him of his heritage by playing rap records – my editor at the time at Weidenfield changed this to blues against my wishes, without my awareness, apparently in the belief that white college students living in the late '80s–early '90s would not possibly be interested in rap.

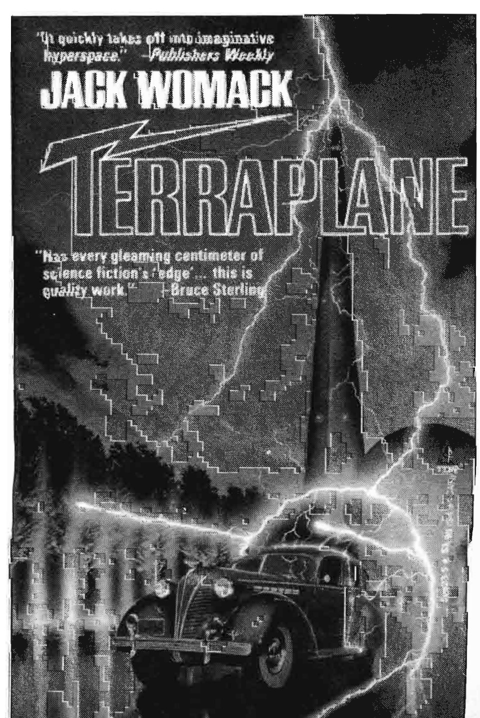
DWH: In case I've missed them completely, what are your major influences (literary, film, musical)? What are you currently listening to/reading/watching?

JW: I've had a number of major influences I suppose, though most have long settled into their own special blend, coming from a variety of sources: Shirley Jackson, Flannery O'Connor, Ambrose Bierce, Mark Twain, **The Great Gatsby**, Nathaniel West, Gogol, Kafka, Joyce, Sylvia Plath, Nabokov, Borges, Charles Fort, fringe literature of all sorts (crypto-zoology, teratology, true-crime accounts, literature of the insane, flying saucer books of the '50s, etc.), comic strips, especially **Krazy Kat**, **Pogo**, and **Dick Tracy**; films of Bunuel, **Citizen Kane**, Ed Wood, sci-fi of the '50s, **A Clockwork Orange** (the movie, not the book), **The Company of Wolves**, **King Kong**, **Freaks**, films of Von Sternberg and Lang, **Jules et Jim**, **Mad** magazine, EC comics, certain marvel titles of the '60s; Goya, Cornell, Max Ernst, the Dadaists, Bosch, Brueghel, Rodin, Turner, Beardsley, Pollock; Mahler, Vaughn Williams, Scriabin, John Lennon, Robert Johnson, Elvis, Patti Smith, the Sex Pistols, David Bowie between 1971 and 1978; my dreaded hometown of Lexington, New York City; numerous girlfriends. Television.

DWH: Okay, here it is – The Obligatory Cyberpunk Question: in reviews of your books, the press (both SF and popular) tends to associate your fiction closely with that of the canonized cyberpunk writers; William Gibson and Bruce Sterling have both made favourable comments about your work that feature prominently on the covers of your books. Do you consider yourself to be part of the cyberpunk school (which the original members seem to have abandoned)?

JW: I don't believe I ever was a cyberpunk. As I'd not read any science fiction (as opposed to movies) until the last two-and-a-half years I was utterly unfamiliar with their work until I'd done **Ambient** and **Terraplane**; I hadn't even heard of Ballard, in truth, until **Ambient** was done. Since then I've gotten to be a fairly constant correspondent with Gibson, and have talked to Sterling. As all former participants seem now to be ex-cyberpunks I believe it's all rather a moot point, except of course at the **New York Times**, which has just discovered it and therefore made it acceptable.

DWH: I think that any discussion of your writing without reference to the influence of Gnosticism would be incomplete; the notion of "God and Godness" which is central to the Ambient religion is definitely a Gnostic concept. Does this come by way of the SF of K.W. Jeter and/or Philip K. Dick? Your presentation of Gnosticism is essentially a positive (i.e. subversive) one. Do you see a darker, possibly fascist, side to Gnosticism as well?[7]


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JW: I've not read Jeter and only read **Valis** last year at some point – I thought it interesting but rather different than the sort of thing I'm doing; I wouldn't call it gnostic, really. The notion of God and Godness in my books, especially as evidenced in **Heathern**, is an explicitly gnostic concept, though my take on the messianic principle I derived more directly from Judaic concepts. Gnosticism, like Christianity, I look upon as an essentially reasonable gathering of beliefs so overlaid with reinterpretation as to nullify the original thought; there has of course been an enormous difference in the degree of overlay between Christianity and Gnosticism, but I think the basic concepts of Gnosticism have been even more twisted round – deliberately, perhaps. The Ambients, of course, took over the Macaffreyan version once they grasped it as being a religion for outsiders – for those forced to remain in this world amid the demiurges, as it were, and attempting to make the best of it. That Bernard and Macaffrey in a sense proffer similar advice to Joanna along this line is certainly deliberate; Bernard is more the fascist version – not so much a difference in statement as in mindset behind the statement; that what seems reasonable can yet be expressed by one mad.

DWH: Do you think that the infusion of cyberpunk with mysticism or Gnosticism will form the core of the next wave of SF ("transcybergnosticism")?

JW: The thought of Gnosticism becoming a recurrent theme in science fiction is a troubling one, for both can't help but suffer for it.

DWH: Last year, **NME** released a double album of covers from Elvis movies entitled **The Last Temptation of Elvis**. In "Elvis is Everywhere," Mojo Nixon says "Man oh man what I want you to see/ Is that the Big E's inside of you and me." The Church of E is one of your most interesting and humourous creations, parodying as it does our collective preoccupation with the life and death of Elvis Aaron Presley. Why has our society deified him, and what particular reference does his apotheosis have for your fiction? Can you tell us anything about your next book, **Elvissey** (and possibly provide a brief excerpt)?

JW: Only part of our society has deified Elvis,[8] and herein lies an aspect of class thus far only hinted at in my works – the C[hurch] of E[lvis]'s believers, including the *nouveau riche* Drydens, essentially come from the lower socio-economic white orders, with all the cultural baggage that entails – the Macaffreyan church (Joanna's) is one much more accepting of a wider number of people, which is why at the end of **Ambient** the allusion is made to all people being, in some way, Ambient – that is **different** or **unique**, dependent on perspective. The C of E is of a much more fundamentalist nature, and therefore more dangerous. In **Elvissey**, set about fifteen years after **Terraplane**, I take this all a bit further, while expanding the viewpoint concerning purely false messiahs, the nature of belief, and how reality is co-opted in pursuit of that belief [the following paragraph is an excerpt from chapter 2 of **Elvissey**, to be published by TOR]:

> *And the Prearmyite denomination was but one: amongst the Elvii were the Hosts of Memphis, the Shaken, Rattled and Rolled, the River Jordannaires; the Gracelandians, the Vegassenes, the Gladyseans; the C of E Now Or Never, the Redeemed Believers in Our Master's Voice, the Church of the True Assumption of His Burning Love and a hundred dozen more. Each schismatrix knew their King true, and saw their road as sole and only; their only given was that, for whatever reason, and – they supposed – at no one's command, the King would return.*

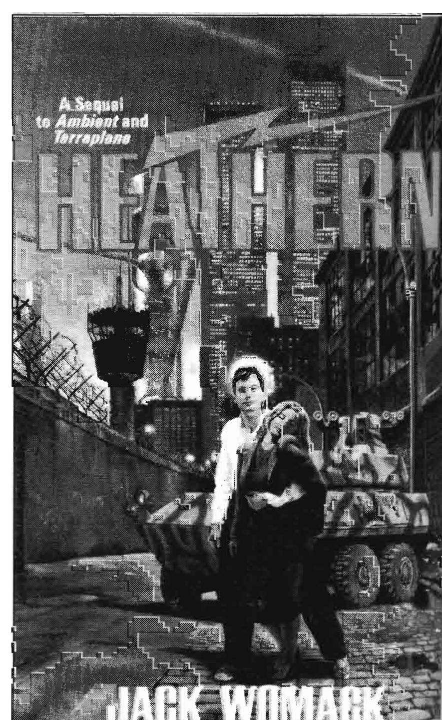
DWH: "Modern times. . . Postmodern reaction," says Jake (after rapidly cutting a man in half with his collapsible chainsaw) in my favourite line from **Terraplane** (p.167). Jake seems to be, in many ways, the logical (post-literate, extremely violent, yet strangely compassionate) product of our current society, an idea which you present in all of your books, but discuss at length in **Heathern**. Would you care to expand on this point?

JW: I think Jake exemplifies a number of aspects of, at least, this particular future, containing within himself traits evidenced in many of the other characters but taken to their ultimate degree. Jake is both an Everyman character and the central figure of the six-book series, for in his greatest flaws are his deepest strengths. Jake thinks of himself as an artist, which distinguished him from O'Malley, for example: O'Malley has kept his work separate from his life but feels, resultingly, as if his work has taken over his life. Jake sees what he does as his *raison d'être*: he believes he knows what the world is, and how best to respond to it, and therefore not only accepts but embraces his lot, taking into account the pluses and minuses to be gained from such a worldview. He can accept, which Joanna cannot; he is content, which Avalon is not; he holds fast to rules, which the Drydens do not; he can shut himself off, which O'Malley and Luther will not, no matter how much they want to shut off. What destroys Jake while simultaneously saving him is the love he feels for Oktobriana, and the love he stirs up in her – that by admitting his humanity it cannot help but destroy him, or at least – in truth – remake him to such a degree that he is no longer recognizable to himself – a personal messiahdom, as it were.

DWH: While we're dealing with "postmodern reactions," to what extent (if any) has postmodern critical theory been an influence on your work?

JW: Postmodern critical theory has not influenced my work, as I've only become familiar with it since undertaking my own theories.

DWH: The culture of the Ambients, longing as it does for a mythical utopian past, and attempting to reach that past through ritual and body modification, seems to be inspired partly by the Modern Primitive



movement,[9] partly by punk. Is this an accurate statement? Is the vision of an Ambient society a call for radical (because still glaringly absent in our world) equality between people?

JW: On one level the aspect of Ambient culture which involves self-mutilation was an extension of punk, taken to a logical extreme; as a metaphor the flaws within their beings illuminate not only their genuine personality flaws, but how they can have a happy life all the same. The vision of this society is certainly a call for equality between people in the sense of being treated as people; and that those better off should help those worse off. I see nothing so radical in this.

DWH: I'd like to talk about the ubiquitous episodes of violence in your fiction. Do you side with J.G. Ballard, seeing representations of graphic violence as a necessary vehicle for social change, or are you attempting to write a kind of ironic moral satire that reveals society's shortcomings through hyperbole, or is it simply gratuitous? Or what?

JW: Oh yes, violence. No, it's not gratuitous; you'll notice in **Heathern** that when violence occurs it occurs off-screen, as it were, or described in such a manner as to bring out emotions other than those normally expected. In **Terraplane** and in **Ambient** the violence most pervasive and most gratuitous is that performed by the societies upon their members. The individual acts of violence are to be expected from those trained to respond in such manner, and observed by those overfamiliar to such scenes. If there is a coldness in my characters toward human life, or seeming coldness in certain characters, it results from self-protection – they can't bear to see any more than they allow themselves to see, and all is such daily fare that violent acts carry little more weight than TV commercials – they can't distinguish between the two, sometimes.

DWH: Have you had any run-ins with the growing numbers of right-wing fundamentalist censors in the U.S.A.? Or, conversely, has anyone offered to make **Ambient** into the next Schwarzenegger vehicle?

JW: I've had no run-ins with American guardians of morality. I've had some run-ins with American and British guardians of literature, and of the purity of science fiction in particular.

In theory, from what my agents tell me, Bruce Willis's people looked at **Ambient** at least three times. I leave you to draw your own conclusions.

DWH: The alarming growth rate of multinational corporations like Dryco is a central concern of your fiction, and of much other contemporary SF. In Canada, many of us saw the Canada–U.S.A. (and soon Mexico) Free Trade act as a blatant instance of big business and government frog-marching us down the path toward Canada as a wholly-owned subsidiary of the U.S.A., Inc., yet the deal was apparently of little concern to most U.S. Americans. What are your thoughts on what the bulk of U.S. Americans know and/or care about (a) the mix of megabusiness and politics and (b) Canada?

JW: The bulk of Americans know nothing and care less about the mix of megabusiness and politics; that's actually unfair – they do know, but such has been going on for so long that all is accepted, that every business has a little bit of Dryco in it. I should think they know less about Canada. I very much enjoyed Toronto when I was visiting there.

DWH: Is there anything you'd like to add that I've left out?

JW: The only things I'd like to add are:

1) All of my books do have a structure, both in and of themselves and within the broader context of the series. If you see none, you've missed something, and should reread it.

2) If I hadn't wanted the last paragraph of **Heathern** to go exactly as it is written, I wouldn't have written it.

3) If there are any doubts, I know exactly what I'm doing.

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Bookstore yourself ASAP; Womack's essentialled.

—Darren Wershler-Henry

Notes

1. in Briggs and Peat, p. 45.
2. Maddox's "Cobra, She Said: An Interim Report on the Fiction of William Gibson," although published almost five years ago, is still one of the best general introductions to Gibson's fiction (see list of Works Cited for particulars).
3. At first, I resisted reading this passage literally, because Womack's books are full of failed Messiahs, but then I rediscovered the following passage from **Ambient**: "Macaffrey, the story went, came as Messiah just before the Ebb and proceeded to suffer the traditional fate of messiahs. Joanna spread the word he brought. It remained a common, if generally unspoken, belief that she yet lived, hiding away somewhere in the wilds of Long Island." (p.158) It would have been easier to see Joanna's moment of revelation as a pantheistic-humanist thing (i.e. something to the effect of "there's a little bit of the Messiah in us all"), but the textual evidence indicates otherwise. Presumably she'll re-emerge later in the series as Womack works his way up to some sort of unimaginable *Gotterdämmerung* (we can only hope).
4. in Briggs and Peat 47.
5. "An attractor is a region of phase space which exerts a 'magnetic' appeal for a system, seemingly pulling the system toward it." (Briggs and Peat, 36). The proliferation of attractors is the cause of turbulence; Womack's texts are turbulent because of the many "attractor points" that plot the plot of the "phase space" of his fictional world.
6. Tom Maddox, in "Maddox on Gibson" (**Virus 23** #0), says the following:
Not long ago, we [he and William Gibson] were talking on the phone, and Bill had Emmylou Harris's new album playing in the background ... We talked about other music we'd heard and liked lately: Lou Reed's **New York** album ... The Cowboy Junkies ... Leonard Cohen. (25)
Bruce Sterling, in **Mondo 2000** #1, tells a similar story:

> *I always thought my tastes were idiosyncratic until I talked to a friend who works for A&M records. She said, "Oh, yeah. Alternative College Circuit."* (p. 100)

John Shirley (who no longer has green hair) may be the exception to this rule.
7. This is too big a topic to go into here; interested parties are directed to **Gnosis** #14 (Winter 1990), which focuses on "The Dark Side" of Gnosticism.
8. As Chuck D of **Public Enemy** says, "Elvis / Was a hero to most / But he never meant shit to me." **Living Color** has also pointed out that "Elvis is dead." It's a racial as well as a class thing.
9. Those unfamiliar with this term are directed to **Re/Search** #12, **Body Art**, **Tattootime**, or **Piercing Fans International Quarterly** magazines.

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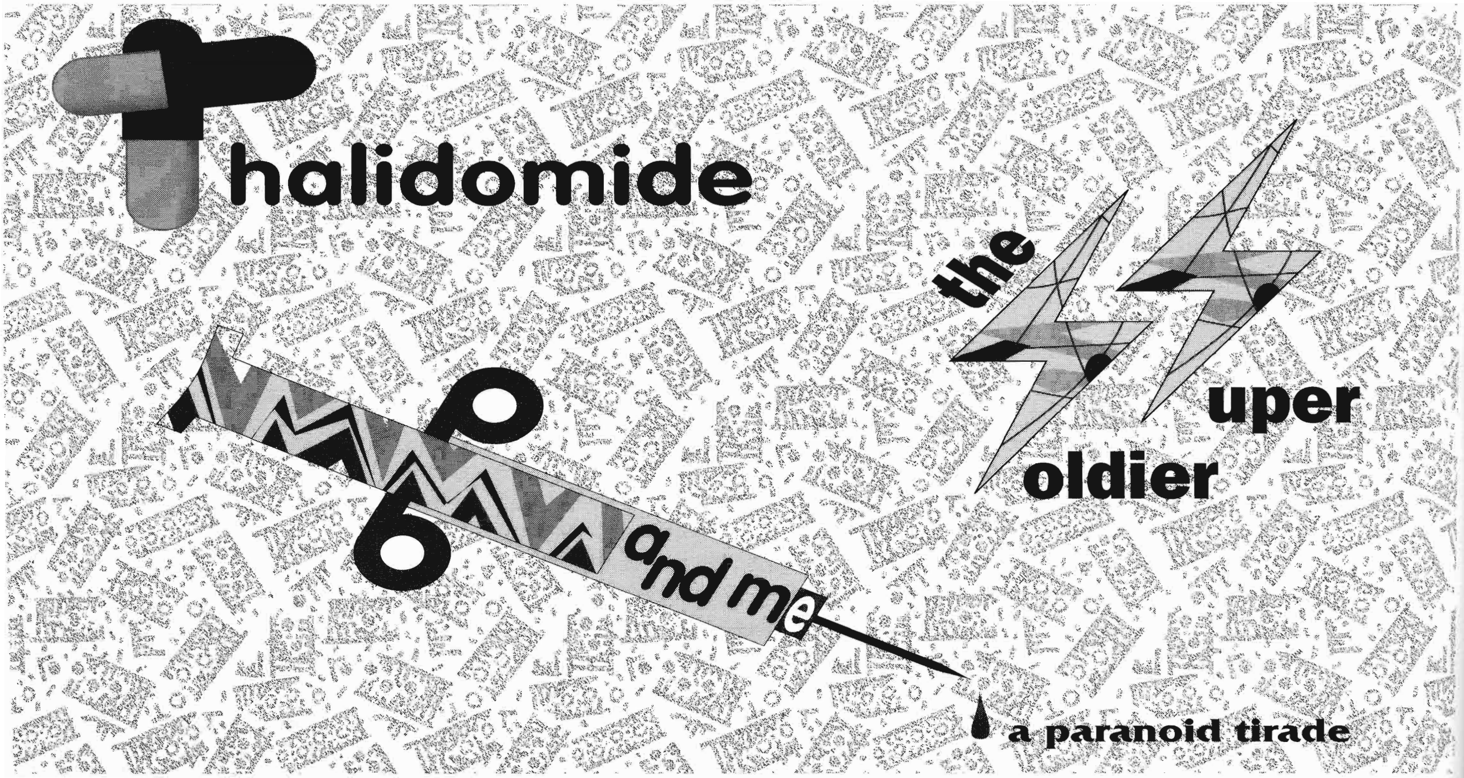
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Hello. I feel as if I've known you all my life, but more on that later. Have you ever wondered why you're so fucking weird? Have you wondered why you stopped refuting those who called you weird? Of course not, deep down all of us **know** that we don't belong. So really, the question that I wish to address is: **How old were you when you realized you were not of this earth?**

We're called **twentysomething** (how I hate the name), **the Lost Generation part 2, the Nowhere Generation** (**the Now Here Generation**? Hmmmm), and several other hokey **TIME** magazine bullshit names. At least **Post-punk** is historically accurate. Sociologists and demographers want to define us, but they can't get close enough. We're too cynical, or is it just mean-spirited? Who are we? How did we get this way? My answer may astound you, but more likely it will simply fit into the grey world-view you've already come to love. Please hang tight as I attempt to clear up a little of the history of **THE GREAT OBSERVERS**.

The first **Great Observer** would have been born in about 1961.

PART 1: THE DRUGS WE DIDN'T TAKE

When we were growing up monsters were our friends. We played with them; they were our cartoons, our breakfast cereals, our model kits, our black-light posters, and our icons. We loved the Cookie Monster, **Famous Monsters of Filmland**, **Kolchak: the Nightstalker**, and **Count Chocula**. Compared to the conservative **TMNT** pap today, we lived in a very surreal world.

I could list pages of films and comics and toys that we had (or wanted) and point out the weird little subtexts of each, but you probably already do that with your friends. Instead, I would like to introduce the idea that we were the first 'Perma-stoned' generation.

LSD had a far greater effect on those who **did not** take it. We lived in a world where we were constantly exposed to the acid-leftovers of everyone around us, and consequently spent about five years in a 'contact high.' Lettering on books, comics, and movie posters all dripped psychedelia. Everything around us was 'turned on' by the Madison Ave. boys who saw the mid-late '60s as an easy buck.

However, there were 'turned-on' artists who kept some of their hippie ideals and were truly strange. Sid and Marty Krofft (**Pufnstuf**: "Holy Smokes Jimmy! Witchiepoo's givin' me a heavy!"), and other children's programmers allowed us to grow up in a world where acid logic and psychedelic art were the norm. Consider any one of the animated sequences on **Sesame Street** and you'll see what I mean (let alone the twisted relationship between Big Bird and his imaginary friend Mr. Snuffulupagus). In fact, the Children's Television Workshop were bold enough to brag about their drugged-out worldview in the theme songs: "We're gonna turn it on. We're gonna give you the power!"

We didn't have to do acid; everyone did it for us. We were, nonetheless, very stoned little people. If you consider the amount of sugar that we were ripped on, on any given Saturday morning, it must have been the kiddie equivalent of a handful of bennies. Compound the sugar high with afternoons spent in a poorly ventilated room with a tube of Testor's glue, building Aurora glow-in-the-dark models of our favourite monsters. Small wonder we gave them such fucked paint-jobs – "How much blood is too much blood on the hunchback's back?"

But, this 'stoned-kid' syndrome isn't the only thing that worked on us. There's more to it than a love for strange movies and music, which our more conservative peers seem to hate. There has to be, otherwise everybody would be like us, and as you are undoubtably aware, almost nobody is.

PART 2: THE DRUGS WE DID TAKE

As we know, paranoia is just safe thinking. We have deep-rooted reasons to suspect that the absolute worst possible scenario is much closer to the truth than we would like to believe.

Consider what we know about the types of weapon-testing going on in the late '50s and early '60s. It's safe to assume that everyone was getting tired of the A-bomb and the H-bomb. They worked great and the effects were well-documented; it was time to move on. We started to hear about genetic engineering and germ war-


COOKIES
TV GUIDE
BACK THIS FALL: COWBOY ASSWIPE
FAMOUS MONSTERS
TOMB '91

fare in the mid-'70s, so we can assume the military had been playing with them for twenty years.

At this time (and this is only my paranoid theory, but if you can find a hole in it, please write to me), the military were introducing chemicals into the general population to test them.

> *In 1988, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, which secretly co-sponsored psychiatric experiments at Montreal's Allan Memorial institute in the late 1950s and early 1960s, agreed to pay a total of $750,000 to nine Canadians who were suing them. The experiments, conducted by Dr. Ewen Cameron, included repeated electroshock treatment, long drug-induced periods of sleep and a variety of brainwashing techniques, including sensory deprivation.*
>
> *Linda MacDonald could not sue the CIA because she was treated in 1963, after the agency had pulled out of the program.* (Sean Fine reporting in **The Globe and Mail**, March 6, 1990)

One of these drugs mimicked the effects of radiation sickness: a kind of 'neutron bomb' to be put into the water system to rapidly destroy people, but leave the property untouched. Thalidomide was produced by Grünethal, a West German pharmaceutical firm, and was distributed between 1958 and 1961 (when it was discovered to be the cause of "epidemics" of deformed children). The drug was taken by mothers-to-be on the advice of their physicians in West Germany, the United Kingdom, Scandinavia, and North America. It was introduced as a sedative and a cure for morning sickness.

Three groups of women ingested it: (a) a control group: (b) a test group: and (c) a 'wild card' group. The effects of this drug were visible from the outset. Group (a) were left mildly affected or unaffected. Group (b) received mild mutations, missing or mutated limbs etc., but were 'normal' in most respects. Group (c) were altered to such a degree that few remain alive today.

Another weapon which seemed promising at the time was genetically altered Super-soldiers (like Captain America) who would be able to utilize new types of weapons (without the psychological side-effects that dropping nukes seemed to have on the human mind). This soldier had to be amoral and ultra-cynical to fight the battle that seemed inevitable as the Cold War raged on. A soldier had to be developed that would be psychologically capable of putting thalidomide into the Soviet



Union's water supply. So another drug was introduced, most likely passed off as some sort of vitamin for pregnant women; the effects of this drug weren't as immediately noticeable. Cynicism and critical thinking can't be seen until the school years; a four-year-old's life is far too idyllic.

Eventually, children were given yearly standard I.Q. tests across the board, and were labelled 'gifted', 'average', or 'below average', and educated accordingly. *You must use only an HB pencil. Once you have completed this section !STOP! do not go on. You have 25 minutes to complete this section. You may begin.* This was the only way to test the effects that the "vitamin" was having. Again there were three groups who took the drug: the control group would do average, or slightly better, on the tests. The (b) group were the little 'geniuses' who scored well and accelerated grades, either burning out in University and slitting their wrists over an 8.5 GPA, or did exceptionally well and married good Christians. Group (c), the wild cards, are still mutating. Group (c) is what the Super-soldier would have been. They either did well in school for awhile, and ceased to care, or they did shitty from day one. Can you remember your parents saying, "We know you can do better ...". **How did they know?** What made them so goddamn sure anyway!?!? How did our parents know **anything** about our supposed intelligence? Who told them?

Do you remember the **Starsky and Hutch** meet Dracula episode? In grade five I watched it instead of studying for my spelling test. No big deal, right? Wrong. My teacher pulled my file, scowled at it for awhile and then sent me to the dumb people class. It blew my mind, but I couldn't just say, "Look, I didn't study, I'm sorry! Let me rewrite it tomorrow."

Dumb people class was inhabited by the poor children, and the truly dumb kids from the small town I grew up in. I was horrified to discover **number lines** on the desks! Then Mr. Palmer, the 'dumb people' teacher, gave us a math test that seemed geared for grade one. I finished it in two minutes (as any grade five student would) and gave it back. He thought I was being a smart-ass, but when he marked it, he got out my file again. "How would you like to play a little game, since you've finished your work so early?" He got out a few of the tests we wrote at five years old. "Hmmm. You can go back to your class now." Well I guess! If my mother knew I was sent to dumb people class she'd have hung herself. Now I'm not saying I was a boy genius, but I found it remarkable that they monitored us so closely. Why all the secret files? Why does the school make three copies of anything that goes on your 'permanent record'? The school puts one in **your** file, but who gets the other two? Your folks sure as hell don't!

As Control monitored Group (c), the fact that they were universally the school misfits worried them. The pertinent factor unaccounted for in the creation of a 'cynical Super-soldier', is that the dominant genetic code for critical analysis would create a group that rejected authority as often as possible, if only because they were bored. Steal from work, lie to the census, fuck around in school, write the wrong "bulk bin" number on your Parmesan cheese ...

What sounded paranoid made sense when applied to my own strange educational history. The frightening part is, as I am forced to act more and more in the so-called 'straight' world, I'm growing weirder daily. My circle of friends is growing larger, while at the same time becoming more selective. We decide how we feel about each other quite quickly, usually within a couple of minutes when we first meet.

Scanners is our **Genesis**.

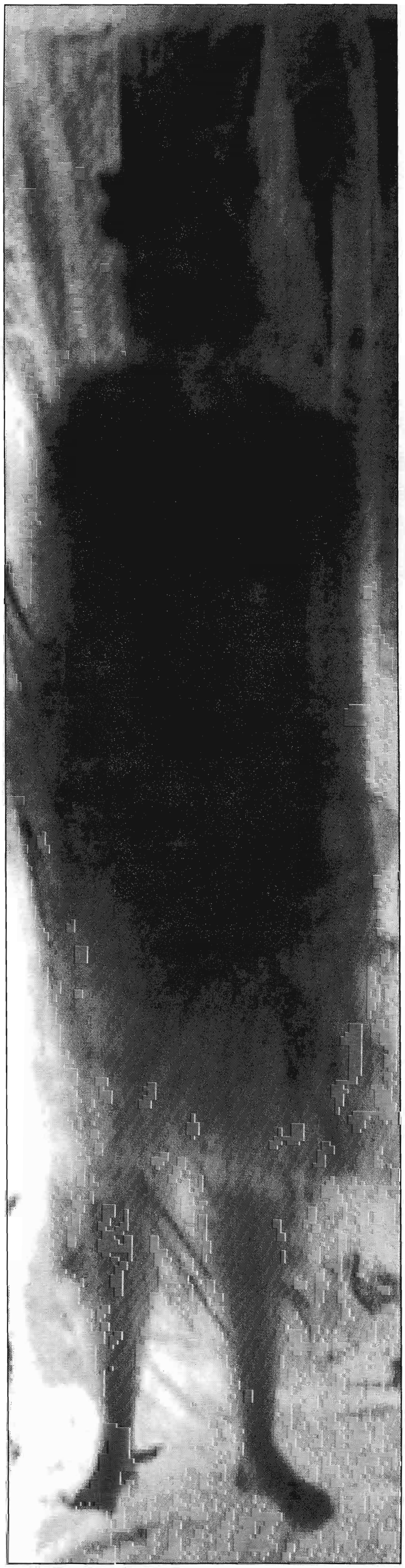
And we are an incestuous group, we tend to associate exclusively with each other. It stands to reason that we will breed selectively; with each other, if at all. If we are genetically different from our peers, our children will indeed be different. Taken to its most paranoid extreme, they may be the next evolutionary step. They will breed exclusively as well (perhaps even selectively in pre-arranged genetic 'marriages'). Perhaps they will be the sort of being best able to survive in the 21st Century. *Homo sapiens sapiens*'s time may be up. **Long Live The New Flesh!**

Or we may be destined to mellow out and get careers and marry nice people and have nice children and live in pink houses and dress in colours. It seems unlikely. The weirder I become, the more certain I am that I'm powerless to stop it. We mutate daily.

Our mutations draw us closer together. We network with music, magazines, modems, films, books, and even 'party lines'. We're the biggest geeks on the planet, and we're getting geekier. We're the only cynical fan-boys (people) who still horde information. As we learn to use new technologies, and get straight jobs that allow us to play around a little more, we become more subversive, and occasionally more dangerous. We're slowly infiltrating their system as teachers, entrepreneurs, and God help us, civil servants. What's become of the Super-soldier? I predict: We will warp the world to fit our needs and demands. If Iggy can get on David-fucking-Letterman, perhaps the time is nigh.

—Kelly Simpson





Jehova Whimsical

(and the Nature of Being)

It was a bright and splendorous day, when the nature of my being struck me down like the will of God. For it was God, and I know that now. In retrospect however, I must confess oblivion; sitting innocently in the pasture with my closest friends and confidants, enjoying the rarity of the moment. I was not expecting anything quite so brazen as the meaning of life to come crashing down upon me. And so, when the answer to my meagre existence appeared before me, I was forced to reconsider the Whimsical way.

The memories I hold, of my first five years in this world are vague, but I will never forget the pastures. My biological parents, unable to accommodate the needs of a small child, had left me under the guidance of a flock of sheep. It was here that I came to know and love the vast, green pastures of Two Hills, Alberta. It was also here that a wandering farmer named Jeremiah found me, and took me away from my ungroomed haven. Although life had been blissful and carefree in the company of my wooly cohorts, I realized the value of this transition. It was neither a loss nor a gain, but merely an inevitable change, not unlike the change I would endure only fifteen-and-a-half years later.

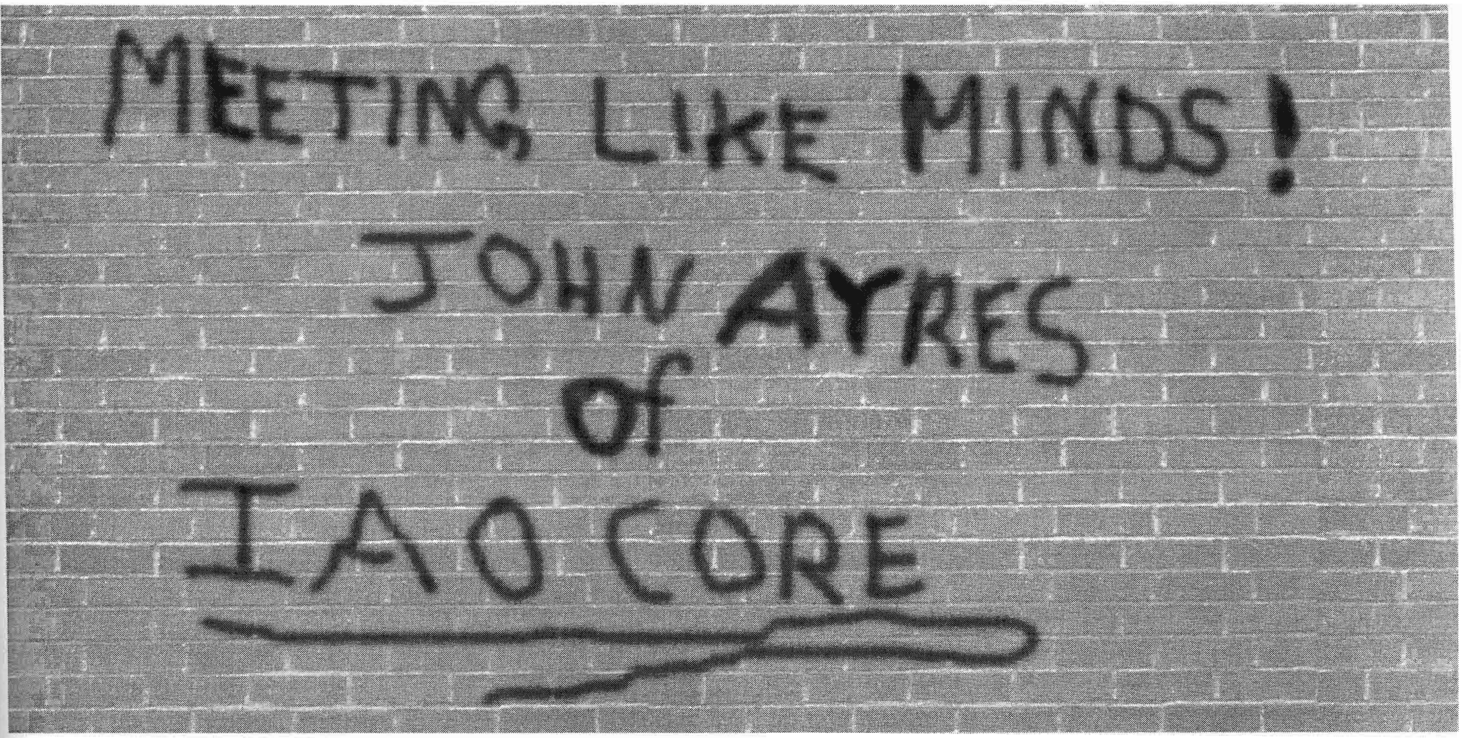
Jeremiah and Agnes Whimsical had raised me well. Father respected my desire to reminisce in the pastures, for he somehow knew that as I got older, these lazy days in the company of my favourite sheep would become less frequent. And they did. For as I neared the age of twenty-one, I knew I would have to make some decisions. Once I made the final step into manhood, I would be obliged to enter the fast-paced world of politics, as my father once had.

This was one of the things I pondered, just moments before my illumination, on that bright and splendorous day. For in less than two months, I was to undergo my initiation into the Alberta Christian Wheat Party. Father had been an outstanding member for over thirty-seven years, and so when Laurence Begat personally approved my membership, I was not surprised. "Saviour Begat," as he liked to be called, held not only the position of Party leader, but also that of minister, mayor and barber on Saturday afternoons. Being a close and personal friend to Jeremiah, he watched me grow from a carefree young lamb, to a strapping young gentleman with provincial interests.

But on that day, that bright and splendorous day, I agreed that my interests were to become far more than just provincial. They were destined to be national, perhaps international. My awe for the stupendous Laurence Begat was shamed, when the revelation had occurred. For on that bright and splendorous day I realized, not only the nature of my being, but the nature of TV Evangelism.

—Jennifer Konojacki





Multi-media artists **Iao Core** opened for **Psychic TV** in San Francisco. That performance (a ritual, rather than the psychedelic post-industrial music I was expecting) was an incredibly stimulating, and intriguing, experience. John Ayres, a founding member of **IAO Core**, later told me that the group traditionally has two kinds of performances; the musical beat type (which is more body-oriented and designed to get people physically involved), and the more ritualistically oriented performances (which are considered personal experiences for both band members and the audience). For example, at one show they got the audience to work together to form a mental energy force, like a global umbrella. They suggested that everyone visualize a ball of energy above the club, then picture themselves on the globe, then in Berkeley, and finally in the club itself. Then, the audience was to pick two or three people that they had a positive connection with, imagine where they were and direct their beam of energy to the club, forming a giant psychic umbrella comprised of the audience and their far-flung friends. John called it "A more positive version of the Strategic Defense Initiative, called The Peace Umbrella."

They're involved in many different areas of artistic expression, but first and foremost, they're an excellent psychedelic industrial-rock band, with a great tape called **Strange Attractors** (including a song based on Philip K. Dick's **The Divine Invasion**). They also appear on the CD **Arrhythmia – A Collection of Percussion and Rhythm**. Based in the Bay area, **IAO Core** are also involved with various types of art and performance; video production (like the disturbing acid-visions of **Gaia Footbridge**); and they present the yearly **Abject and Unusual Film Festival** (featuring works by Nick Zedd, Richard Kern, Stan Brakhage and other cool filmmakers). Obviously, they keep rather busy. John also publishes a wild 'zine called **The Core**. It's crammed full of interesting art, chaos comics, bizarre sex, poetry, and other bits of under-culture that took a bite out of my brain, chewed it up and swallowed. I was hooked.

Since I was in the area John and I got together one night to drink Bacardi coolers and trade stories. We had a lot in common, an interesting, and refreshing, surprise. There's something weird happening out there. It's really obvious when you meet people who turned out like you, even though completely different paths were taken. Whatever the common factor is, ultimately it leads to people to talk with.

John grew up in the suburbs of Walnut Creek, east of San Francisco. When he was fourteen (about fifteen years ago) three events occurred that forever altered his perspective on life. He discovered sex, drugs (mushrooms), and meditation, though not necessarily in that order. Then came that familiar sense of alienation as he found out that the other suburbanites were absolutely unable to relate to what he experienced (this rang a bell). To combat his growing frustration, he put a magazine together, because "I wanted to meet like-minded people." **The Core** began his search.

"The first couple of issues were written all by myself using different names, so it would look like it was produced by more than one person. To distribute it I'd go into Berkeley to the used-record store and slip the magazine into open copies of **Throbbing Gristle** records, or anything else I found interesting." He met Demitria Von Thraam this way, and together they started the **Iao Core** performance project with John on guitar, keyboards, and vocals, while Demitria did percussion, vocals, and chaos. The other members; Kris Force (violin, bass and vocals), M.C. Schmidt (synths, funk muscle and programming), and David Gardner (turntables and guitar), met under similar circumstances. They all have solo projects as well; of particular note is Kris Force's cassette **Aurora**.

Moving into a warehouse in San Francisco was an important event in their

development. This arrangement gave them access to equipment and allowed them to interact with other artists. It also provided a place to do performances and art exhibits:

"For a while, it was one of the only places in San Francisco that you could see alternative performances. Frank Moore, a physically handicapped man who does erotic shamanism, invited the audience to participate in a kind of a erotic play that's not really sexual, but more child-like. During one performance he created a human maze; the audience was blindfolded and had to walk through a maze made up of naked people."

Another interesting performance was done by Kristine Ambrosia, Monte Cazazza, and other artists. They did a series of events based upon Polynesian ritual. Kristine filmed it and sent it to different people around the world, so the final section of the performance was done internationally. **Coil** did the performance in London, and there were others simultaneously in New York and San Francisco, while Kristine was in Hawaii. They were all hooked up *via* computer and were sending her the information. It was truly global. So it was basically a world-wide ritual." [An article was written about this ritual by Tim O'Neill for **Gnosis** #6.]

Throughout our conversation John repeatedly stressed the importance he places upon individuality, not only in creative expressions, but all aspects of one's life. For example, although he's amassed considerable information about various ideologies, and has respect for many of them, he hasn't joined any yet. This strong sense of individuality is shared by all the members of **IAO Core**, enhancing both their solo projects and the group's work. They enjoy working together and sincerely hope this comes across to the audience. "We feel that if we continue to do what we do in a positive manner, it will have greater impact, and help to promote change in a positive way." Promoting change through positive energy, and encouraging people to have 'peak experiences', are of particular interest. "If more people could learn to have peak experiences we would be a healthier society," says Ayres.

"We always want to make it apparent that if anyone was given the right equipment and time, they too, can express themselves that way. It's a do-it-yourself type of thing. That's what we're trying to promote. I don't believe that artists are an elite group. Art is a part of human psychology that everyone can express. Hopefully, people will do their own magazines and create their own types of art."

I came away from our talk with a lot of respect for the way he explores his views, and creates situations for himself in which he can obtain the maximum amount of information and stimulation. It was an altogether enlightening meeting of like minds.

—Cathy Gernack

Like minds can contact **IAO Core** at 326 Dogwood Drive, Walnut Creek, CA 94598 USA.



Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture

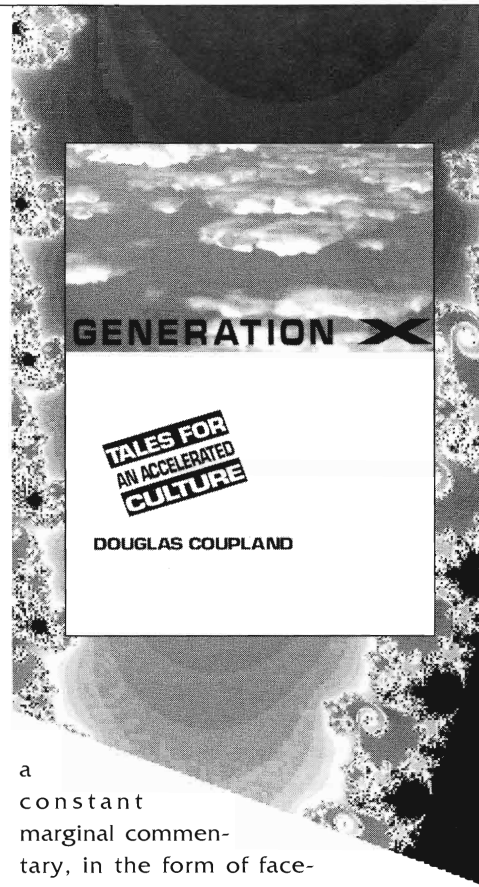
by Douglas Coupland
New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991, 183 pp.

At first, I thought, "This may be it: the **On the Road**, or the **Canterbury Tales** of our generation: **the twentysomethings, the MEME generation, the neo-Nihilists, the Re-generation ... Generation X.**" But, then the publicity machine went to work, and I got sick of reading reviews of it. It's certainly a good book, but I've lost some of my zeal. Maybe I should just watch **Slacker** again, and fantasize about the woman who's listening to the **Butthole Surfers** while expounding about chaos as her friend makes an altar to her menstrual cycle. Anyway, this is the review as it was written, when it first came out, a long time ago.

Imagine reading Baudrillard while simultaneously watching **The Flintstones** on deep cable, swilling beer, and hooting on a big ol' Oil Slick. Voila: **Generation X**. Intellectual, theoretical and self-analytical, but also shamelessly kitschy, unmotivated, cynical, and temporarily stupid from too much good dope. Kinda cool, kinda scary, it's a lot like life (so the song goes).

The frame narrative for the book involves three twentysomethings living in Palm Springs, the capital city of the Society of the Spectacle. In the middle of the desert, it is the ultimate space of simulation: "Why are the deserts so fascinating? It is because you are delivered from all depth there – a brilliant, mobile, superficial neutrality, a challenge to meaning and profundity, a challenge to nature and culture, an outer hyperspace, with no origin, no reference points." (Baudrillard, **America**, p.124) Accordingly, all that's left is the proliferation and ceaseless exchange of signs. "We know that this is why the three of us left our lives behind us and came to the desert - to tell stories and make our own lives worthwhile in the process." (**Generation X**, p.8)

Not only do the stories refer to their own fictionality internally, but there is also



a constant marginal commentary, in the form of facetious definitions, *detourned* **Biff**-like cartoons, and Xeroxed neo-Situationist slogans. "YOU MIGHT NOT COUNT IN THE NEW ORDER," (p.159) or "WE'RE BEHAVING LIKE INSECTS." (p.71) Along with the definitions, these slogans may be the best part of the book (and, when you stop to think about it, ignoring the text and concentrating on the notes is a typical twentysomething reading strategy):

> *HISTORICAL UNDERDOSING: To live in a period of time when nothing seems to happen. Major symptom includes addiction to newspapers, magazines, and TV news broadcasts.* (p.7)

> *HISTORICAL OVERDOSING: To live in a period of time when too much seems to happen. Major symptom includes addiction to newspapers, magazines, and TV news broadcasts.* (p.8)

If you're twentysomething, reading the book will give you the eerie feeling that Coupland has been sitting in your closet for the last five or six years, watching you through the cracks and taking notes.

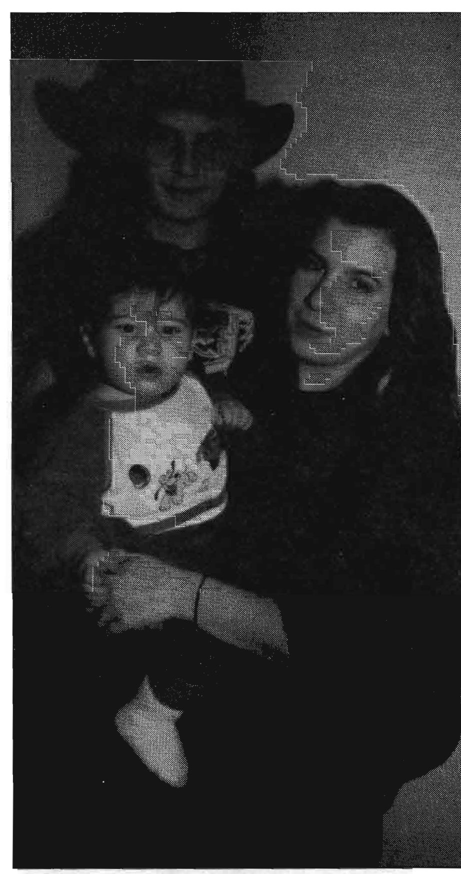
It'll also look really cool sitting beside your copy of the **AMOK Catalog**, your **Re/Search** back issues, and Baudrillard's **America** and **Cool Memories** (incidentally, **Generation X** bears a remarkable resemblance in physical format to the latter two titles that is likely more than coincidental):

> *OBSCURISM: The practice of peppering daily life with obscure references (forgotten films, dead TV stars, unpopular books, defunct countries, etc.) as a subliminal means of showcasing both one's education and one's wish to disassociate from the world of mass culture.* (p.165)

Right. Go ahead, buy it. If you're one of us, you either have (by some fluke) the money and it's no problem to do so, or you're willing to eat KD for a week and sacrifice those **Soundgarden** tickets to come up with the cash.

Besides, Coupland is Canadian, and we should support our country while we still have one.

—DWH



The Black Family

ANGST & DREAD

Life In Video Culture

Gerald Saul lives in Regina and recently travelled western Canada promoting his film, **Angst**. It's a way-too-cool half-hour "Depressionist" vampire movie (without a drop of blood). It follows Kynth, a lonely vampire woman, who's seen too many bodies in 697 years of feeding two or three times a week. She finds a human companion, a terminally depressed filmmaker with a 28-inch TV, and tries to adjust herself to the twentieth century. As the tag-line goes: "You can be good for all your life, or you can be evil forever."

Angst gets three claws up, because it survives multiple viewings. It's experimental, but not Art-School (probably because Gerald has a sense of humour). The film stars Brian Stockton as the film geek, and Dawn Henderson as the sexy dancing vampire. Gerald also co-directed [with Stockton] the post-holocaust farmer-on-the-road cult hit **Wheat Soup**. He was also associate producer of Stockton's latest feature, **The 24 Store**.



Bruce Fletcher: What are you working on now?

Gerald Saul: The Man With the Rocket Shoes, a very exciting space-opera that's too expensive to make. I wrote it, but it'll probably sit on the burner forever. **Dream Sequence** has been in the works for two years and is in post-production. It's a wacky comedy with a happy ending. They rush into each other's arms and live happily-ever-after, which is completely unrealistic because everyone knows they're doomed to be locked up in jail. But they believe they're happy, so I guess that's what's important.

I'm also starting **Dread**, part two of a trilogy. It's the unofficial sequel to **Angst** because there's not really any similarity, except it'll be the same length, and in somewhat the same style with layers of sounds and images not necessarily in phase. **Dread** is more of a documentary about fear; what people think they're afraid of, if you ask them, which then evolves into what they're really afraid of.

BF: Why is **Angst** a "Depressionist" film?

GS: I was writing it late at night, when my life was sort of dismal and dull and unattractive to anybody. One morning I was writing on the bus with the sunlight shining in and it was all wrong. I ended up throwing out all the daytime stuff. **Angst** is just a sampling of the dark side of my life, my fear, pain and all that. I wrote it in bad moods and threw everything else out.

BF: But it's funny.

GS: If you're always depressed, then you're not. People who have major mood swings can't last. If it's your natural state of mind, it seems OK and you get a sense of humour about it. If you don't, then you die.

BF: Black humour to cope.

GS: Very much. My friends are like that too. We tell "How bad can it get?" stories. It's a challenge to have a worse life than your friends.

I think the greatest threat to me as a "Depressionist" is that I seem to be getting better at finding meaningful situations that make me happy. Now life seems to be getting easier, and it worries me. That's going to change everything. I get very self-analytical. My new things aren't necessarily about depression, they deal with the stuff much deeper than that: the root of it all. Eventually the bad day might come when I've purged all of this shit, and it will come to an end.

BF: What do you think you have in common with other prairie filmmakers?

GS: I do feel there's a similarity between say, Regina's film community and the one in Winnipeg; similarities in themes and approach more than anything. Maybe not in style, but in the **desire to create** whatever it is that you're doing. Although we're frequently doing the same sorts of things, for some reason we don't network at all. We don't say, "I'm doing this, what do you think?" I try to keep my opinions, work, and research down to a select few. Why would that be? Let's analyze it. (Long Pause) I'm not sure. It's not even jealousy; a number of years ago there was paranoia about people stealing ideas from one another, but it doesn't happen. If I don't have enough ideas of my own I should drop out of the business.

BF: Do you accept the idea of regional styles?

GS: A few years ago I heard it analyzed into ideas of the prairies, our heritage, the arts that came before us, isolation, and all these things. A bunch of film groups from western Canada got together to talk about their particular centres. I'll buy it to a limited extent,

but I think it comes down to the people who work together.

BF: How do you get funding for your films?

GS: I'm expected to do what is expected from me, and from my centre, when I apply for a grant.

BF: Do you seriously consider that?

GS: I try not to, but it's impossible. You want money: it all rides on money. If there's anything I'm afraid of, it's the fear of being broke and not having money to do the things I'm doing. Money makes people into slaves. If you don't have money then you're under the control of whoever. But, if you **do** have money, it becomes a measure of who you are: whether you use that money to control people or not. The first thing you should do with money is to free yourself. Money equals freedom in this society. When I apply for a grant, two or four people decide if I'm going to be broke and need a job. You can't help but think, "what do they want to hear?" It's scary when you start throwing in some little patriotism statement or something. I sometimes do the opposite. I'll talk about how I hate this and that, which sometimes works. They think it's funny: "Hey, this guy's not kissing our asses!"

Presentation of the script is important too. The idea that how the words look on a page affects whether you can make a film or not is completely illogical, but it's reality.

BF: Do you think there's any reality to the "twentysomething" idea?

GS: There was an issue of **TIME** [July 16,1990] about 'twentysomethings: the New Lost Generation', or something like that. Everyone I know picked it up, looked at the cover, and flipped through it. No one coughed up the two bucks to buy it. Five seconds of curiosity and the apathy sets back in.

BF: (Laughing) That sense of "Oh yeah, so what" comes through in your films. They're too weird and slow for people much younger than us, and older people don't seem to relate to the profound sense of meaninglessness.

GS: I've had older people ask: "Why are you so depressed?" or "How are you doing?" I'll reply, "Oh, kind of down today." "Why is that?" They're worried about me, and I just say, "Well, that's what I am." In Winnipeg we went to the NFB to watch **Sid and Nancy**. The guy who ran it couldn't even understand why we wanted to see it.

Bad Taste [a great hungry-aliens-on-the-loose gore-comedy from New Zealand, directed, written by, and starring Peter Jackson] is the first thing that I've seen that's intense enough to evoke our memories of things like **The Abominable Dr. Phibes**, which is an important film. When you're ten, it was like ... OOOH gross! So we remember them as being in grossly bad taste. Things our parents wouldn't approve of. Finally there's something else out there that parents wouldn't approve of!

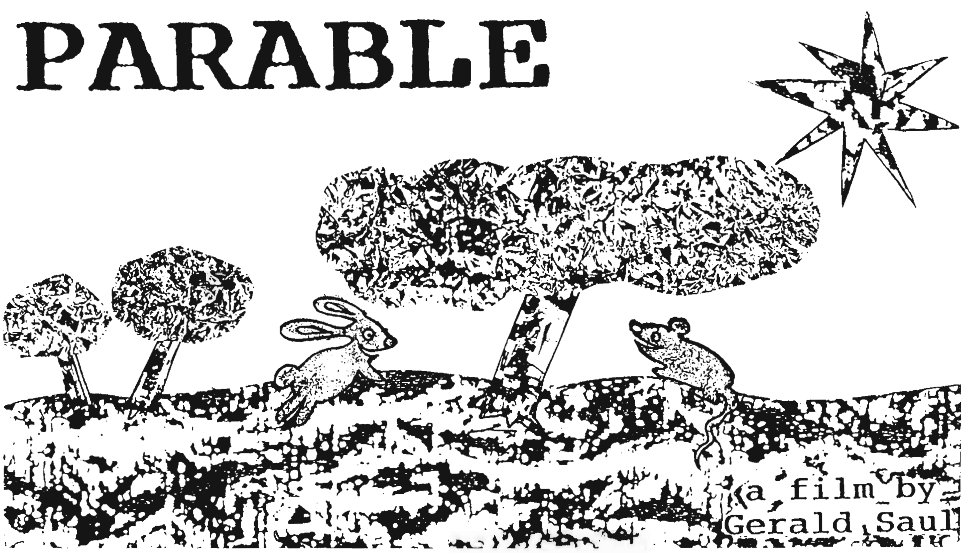
BF: Our taste is surprisingly similar, considering our relative isolation. Maybe it's mass media, like CBC.

GS: The mass media thing is true for TV, but Regina is more isolated than that. Edmonton is pretty isolated, but you have access. I don't think most people in Edmonton, and particularly in Regina, have a lot of art and movies and culture available. TV is the only non-isolated thing, but you watch TV alone; what's more isolated than that?

BF: I don't agree. We have the same music, videotapes, books, and commercial films. Only weird things have to be specially ordered.

GS: I try to protect my isolation. Isolation is what keeps us individuals. If we're all in one world-community then we're all the same as everyone else. If everybody's equal, there's no individuality. So, I'd rather be isolated than in the middle of everything.

BF: Yeah. Northern Canada is kind of a monastic cultural existence. It's easy to be completely cut off from culture. You have to search it out. It won't come to you. Having the same TV channels is interesting though. If there's no 'underground', everybody watchs the weirdest mass-culture stuff.



GS: Regina also got cable TV later than most cities. I was in grade six or seven before I could watch **The Flintstones** at noon.

BF: Now it's different with video. Not always having it probably makes us appreciate it a little more. I used to scan the TV listings every week.

GS: Yeah **The Abominable Dr. Phibes** would come on at midnight, and you'd plan a party around it.

BF: Now that seems so anachronistic; like a '70s theme event.

GS: There's so much I miss. I'm not much of a family person, but I have memories of **The Sound of Music** on TV. Long movies on Saturday night that the whole family could watch. During commercials everyone dashed for popcorn, or Kool-Aid. If you missed any-



thing, they'd fill you in. That can't exist anymore with a cassette. Now, my mom gets up to wander around because she can rewind it. Now the consumer chooses; it isn't chosen for you. Maybe that's it: our lives were chosen for us. Our movie-watching revolved around what was available, and when we could see it.

BF: (Laughs) It gave us something to be nostalgic for, like **The Brady Bunch**, **The Partridge Family** and **The Flintstones** (which may have taught us to laugh at our parents' lifestyle). Cut-and-Paste Culture.

GS: I kind of admired the hippies as a little kid growing up in the '70s. I remember thinking that the hippies changed the world, but I didn't remember a world that wasn't changed by them. I don't **know** if they changed the world. I didn't experience it before them, only after. They might have changed it, maybe not. But I don't see possibilities for change now; I think that's been lost somewhere.

BF: What do you mean?

GS: Well, personal change is possible, but social change ... It absolutely amazes me when someone has a letter-writing campaign that works. It blows my mind; I don't believe it happens. I have this belief that the government does what it wants, and everybody does what they want, except us. (Laughs) We don't get what we want.

BF: (Laughing) I don't believe anything. Especially stuff like the Gulf War coverage

GS: Yeah, but we watched it every day. I've got a video of the war in five hours: three or four minutes a day. I should be able to watch it in an afternoon. But I'm not going to war, even if they draft me. I don't open my mail much, so I can imagine losing it under a pile of unopened correspondence. Eventually they'd come to my door, put a gun to my head and say, "Why didn't you enlist?!" I'll have to say, "I don't know – I forgot." (Laughs)

BF: Invite them in to watch the video.

GS: Our youth was a transition period in many ways. I talk to teenagers now, and there's not much drugs or drinking, not like what we were on the tail end of. My sisters and thirtyish people tell me about the drugs and parties and stuff that existed. I know it existed because I sampled bits of it at one point. We caught the tail end, the transition period.

We're also used to being ignored. This whole idea of not being labelled, and accepting being a part of an invisible generation. It's that isolation thing again. Nobody worried about us and we didn't cause a hassle. We didn't cause uprisings and picket things. That was already done. I got the feeling that there were no more changes to be made. When feminists talk I recognize that there are still changes in Women's Rights that need to be made. But the momentum is already there, and **I** don't feel those differences. I wouldn't even dream of paying a woman less than a man for doing the same job. It's not logical; it's not in our mindset. That was all set: we grew up believing it. No one is fighting against us, and we're not fighting for, or against, anything.



Gerald and Margaret meet a friend in the bar

BF: To hold a protest rally in Edmonton, the organizers had to file for a civil disobedience permit at City Hall.

GS: If they don't file they get arrested?

BF: Yeah; according to my as-reliable-as-any-other source.

GS: I've watched those movies about the '60s; they're supposed to get arrested. (Laughs)

BF: Hippie mythology.

GS: So we didn't cause trouble, and nobody noticed us. How old are you?

BF: Twenty-seven, same as you.

GS: We were even a little too young for the punk movement.

BF: It happened in Alberta a little later, so I caught the tail end of it.

GS: Punk happened in Regina when I was finishing in a conservative high school. Punk was two or three people.

BF: Punk was throwing up to an 8-track of "Never Mind the Bollocks" blasting out of two house-speakers in the trunk of an orange Datsun at a bush-party. We usually listened to **Pink Floyd**, **Nazareth**, **Queen**, **AC/DC**, **Kiss** and **Aerosmith**.

GS: Real Rock and Roll! The most meaningless Rock and Roll! It had no message. We didn't disco, and we weren't really punks. We're **the Do-Nothing Generation.** That's what you should call us.

BF: Anything to sum this up?

GS: I'm just sort of afraid of letting life pass us by, and growing old and dying with nobody knowing we were even here. I like to remember the '70s.

—Bruce Fletcher

> I don't know . . . whether I feel more that I want to punish some aging crock for frittering away my world, or whether I'm just upset that the world has gotten too big – way beyond our capacity to tell stories about it and so what we're stuck with are these blips and chunks and snippets on bumpers.
>
> —Douglas Copeland, **Generation X**

Confessions of a Marginal Man

Too much comfort disrupts my routine. I've never adjusted that well to the domestication process most people undergo as a normal part of living their lives. I hate furniture; I become irritable around it (especially couches) just because it fills up space that could otherwise fulfill more creative purposes like physical movement or, just **the feeling of potential**. This anti-furniture preface, dear readers, is an introduction to my quandary.

So, who am I? I'm a 'marginal man', dwelling and feeding on society's fringe. By society's standards, I am utterly defective – perhaps even suspect of subversive intentions. For starters, I work for no one but myself. Consequently, I've made a possession of time; I own all my time. I live off my beliefs and the point of view they enliven. My trade (as an author/astrologer) requires a continual renewal of perspective, without which, I would fail to read (charts) and write (books) in a manner conducive to my professional standards; i.e., my perspective grows stale without chaos. Like any job, there are occupational hazards. Since mine are probably of no concern to non-marginal types, I'm pretty much left alone to my problems. Until, of course, I meet other marginal types and open up. Or write an article (like this one) about the more difficult adjustments I must keep performing, perhaps because **I am** marginal and enjoy living the marginal life.

My disdain for 'indulgent comfort' (and people who live for it) has sparked a fierce enthusiasm for 'living on the edge', encouraging the ongoing process of waking up to a 'real life'. For a long time, this was an ideal for living and the basis for my secret feelings of superiority to contrary views. After a decade or so, these beliefs insipidly crystallized into a cohesive elitist dogma, arousing emotions of disgust and indignation towards anyone whose life revolved around 'mere security issues'. You see, 'I' was living to 'wake up' and had no time for 'the sleeping'. Oh, yeah. To further establish our differences, I assigned 'them' a name; 'sleepwalkers', for the slow death and psychic stagnation they stood for in my mind. Note: my cosmology was not without its scapegoats.

Entranced by my prized beliefs, I felt permanently set apart from the collective masses of 'sleepwalkers' until the bottom fell through late one starry summer night. In a heated argument with my lover, I suddenly lost control and physically struck her for "being and acting unconscious." I stood there, frozen, by **a cold force** ... a cold force, so pervasive, it inhabited my very being ... my eyes fixating in pain. I remember screaming at her about something so small I still can't remember what it was. I lost control, went 'unconscious' and hurt the best friend I had in the world.

She just looked back at me with unexplainable sorrow and wept openly, for the both of us. I took a deep breath and, turning my upraised palms towards my face, stared at my hands. I did **not** do what I really wanted to do, which was to weep with her and tell her how sorry and wrong I was; the emotional shock showed me right there and then how rigid my ego had grown.

Even amidst the obvious revelation I could not stop feeling immobilized. As I stood there transfixed, staring back at her, she sensed the state I was in and looked away ... almost as if she was embarrassed to see her man in this condition. I remember feeling ashamed, too, yet strangely full of myself. Having struck her, I felt bigger. Or maybe more powerful. I'm not sure; it was pretty confusing. Something she did or said exposed how 'small' I was already feeling inside and striking her made me feel bigger again. (In retrospect, it seems my violence was a reaction to my denial of feeling 'small'. Still, I thought, that's no real justification.)

After several drawn-out moments of dread, I told her I was sorry for striking her ... that I didn't mean it. She shook her head and said she was sorry, too. That was when I saw the damage done. As animals, I saw that I had broken the unspoken and instinctive bond of physical trust between us. A small, quiet shock overcame me. She looked back at me again and the sorrow was gone; her expression was almost tranquil. Looking at her, again, the same quiet shock returned. Something else had disappeared with the sorrow. Her face ... her face looked vague ... windswept. I looked into her eyes, I looked to see her. And she was gone. In her place, there was a small cold force. The same cold force inside me that had flown onto her, into her when she disappeared. That cold force, with my face on it ... the cold force disguised as me ... this force that really isn't me ... flew out my eyes and into her warm heart and that's when she disappeared. My trance broke when she walked away without saying a word.

In my solitude, I asked myself why these feelings of 'smallness' are so excruciating, so difficult for me to permit. What was this ruthless cold force inside of me? It seems my passion for wakefulness, and its incumbent resistance to comfort, has turned out to be another form of sleep from which I am unable to awaken. I feel ignorant and embarrassed ... for my arrogance and lack of real self-knowledge. I see how much I don't have a clue about waking up, let alone the nature and function of sleep; it is something I have clearly taken for granted. All of a sudden sleep is this big mysterious joke that's not very funny.

In retrospect, my lover's response to my own sleep (in striking her) was compassionate enough to awaken me to the state I was in. Without her love, I don't know how much more damage I would've done. The incident has also ignited a small spark of recognition of myself in others; it's more obvious how much I project my own 'sleep' onto others and blame them for my own lack of self-responsibility. In particu-

THE COLD FORCE OF SLEEP



lar, it shows how men are possessed of an awful habit of projecting their inferior and defective qualities ('unconscious' activity, in my case) onto women. Years of trying to become Superman have left me feeling more than a little helpless and not a little insane.

Things aren't any easier now that I've confessed. Even though this experience alerted me to how asleep I really was, remnants of my 'sleep dogma' remain and haunt me ... mocking any attempts to claim knowledge of 'awakened states'. Enlightenment is a bad joke unless it means cultivating a taste for disillusionment with its allocation of ignorance. I do admit there's refuge in the words of Carl Jung when he said, "the experience of the Self is always a defeat for the ego."

Feeling small feels real close to feeling defeated. I'm learning to stay with my feelings of defeat when they come up now. Sometimes when I feel like a whipped dog, I call it 'dog soufflé' and then laugh. In fact the only real change I am experiencing in my life now is a gradual one resulting from my growing acceptance of defeat. These feelings of defeat seem to nurture the basis for genuine 'work'. The effects of defeat are exotic to me. I don't always recognize them, yet when I do, its bottom-line earthiness feels more valuable than my previous jaunts along the high roads of rapture, expanded consciousness and brain pleasure.

In some ways I'm still getting over the Spirit-dominant, soulless 'New Age' dogma I consumed between the years 1982–86. (James Hillman's **Re-Visioning Psychology** articulates the distinction between the darker realm of the 'soul' and the more brilliant, yet emotionally sterile realms of 'spirit'.) It's terribly uncool to say this but I'm still finding bits and pieces of *New Age dogma caught between my* teeth. A play on words comes to mind: use mental floss or get truth decay ...

A sense of non-specific gratitude emerged alongside my feelings of defeat. I feel more grateful for things in general. This gratitude seems significant insofar as it keeps me closer to the ground ... the black ground of my being, if you will. This grew more apparent when one morning certain skeletal remains of my old beliefs turned up and frightened my gratitude away. The cold force returned and this time, my gratitude disappeared.

Old, dead feelings of elitist inflation isolated me and took hold of my body, pulling me down into a sludge of hopeless despair. Thinking I'd be soaking up the sludge all afternoon, I called off my few appointments with the intention of confronting more death. Or, so I thought. Instead of fighting it this time, I got depressed ... on purpose. Spending the afternoon literally dragging my body around, I learned something about sleep ... about **my sleep**. It wouldn't go away, and **I was a sleepwalker**. Eventually, I got acquainted and learned that my sleep never goes away completely and that maybe my personal sleepwalker isn't such a bad guy after all.

Getting to know my 'sleepwalker self' hasn't always been amusing. Sometimes, it's confusing and more often than not, just plain depressing in the most ordinary way; dull, dreary and really quite dismal. After a while I decided to call the old guy Gus ... after a nebulous memory of Gus, the *fireman, on the old* ***Leave it to Beaver*** television show. As I recall, Gus the fireman had this kind of 'old man' walk about him and was almost always close to sleep somehow ... even when The Beave went over to visit him. My sleepwalker feels like that guy Gus. (If, in some parallel universe, that makes me out to be The Beave ... so be it, Wally.) I told you it was depressing. Yet as I look back at it, it's also hilarious. Funny thing about 'truth' ... if something is really true, it's probably going to be really funny somewhere.

Now there are certain things Gus likes and certain things he doesn't like so much. And, if I want to recognize his presence (and I do), I cater to Gus a bit. This is easy enough; his needs are pretty simple and straightforward. For example, he likes to read what he calls "shinies" ... glossy gossip magazines ... especially those by the counter next to the check stands at supermarkets. So, once in awhile, I buy a shiny and consume it like millions of other American sleepwalkers. Gus also doesn't care for dressing up for any occasion. (He figures every day's a holiday, so why make one more special than the other?) This is funny because I don't either; I usually wear all-black or plain, nondescript, behind-the-scenes type of clothing. Then again, maybe that was Gus's taste in the first

place. Sometimes it's tough telling us apart.

There are, however, specific differences between us. For example, Gus is definitely more low-key, low-profile and low-energy. I'm more hysterical, dynamic and high-powered. He feeds off downtime and minds his own business. Intense focus impassions me and I'm 'way too voyeuristic not to notice what goes on inside the people around me. Am I clinically 'manic-depressive' or 'functionally schizophrenic' then? HA! Perhaps if you're paying the bills of the diagnosing psychiatrist. Am I happy? HA! HA! I don't even know the meaning of the word any more; I just know I'm here. And here and now is where the action is.

The issue of 'genuine work on oneself' seems to be nurtured by simple admittance and sometimes, dramatic confession, of the state we're in. The state we're in has nothing to do with the state we 'want to be in' or 'should be in' or 'could be in if only this, that or the other were happening'. These seem more like styles of self-denial. Genuine work, I think, is a matter of **subjecting yourself to the state you're in, whatever its nature**. The shape, form and content of any state is utterly incidental to the startling sobriety of its existence. Perhaps, only that which exists **is** subject to change. "To be or not to be" is no cliché. We are non-entities until we choose, and work, to admit our existent conditions. This alone seems to nourish our lives as distinct entities, instead of the alienated non-entities we've too often confused ourselves into being.

Postscript: I think the diseases of the 21st Century will, for the most part, be psychologically based: expect an epidemic of hybrid schizophrenias infiltrating those psyches unaware of the ever-widening gaps in their once whole nature. It seems to me now that the purpose of insanity is either to enforce a more brilliant sanity, as Dr. R.D. Laing suggests, or to decompose those minds too rigid for change, as tragic fertilizer for future gardens.

Antero Alli is the author of **ASTROLOGIK** and four other books updating archaic mystical systems. For a free "katalog" of his books and astrological services, write him at PO Box 45758, Seattle, WA 98145 USA.



the loved one

Edmonton (home of The Big Mall) produced **the loved one**: rock and roll madmen single-handedly dedicated to overthrowing the status of their quo, yet strangely unable to bend over far enough to score that elusive record contract, much as they'd like it to be rather well-sprung from **Euthanasia** Boddy ash and bio-tubular vestigal organs of Kelly Gibbonmeister (a nihilistic anti-clone grown just a little strange in a leaky vat), for which the medical terminology is too silly to mention, although 1992 is high time to declare them The Perfect Party Machine, except they're too cynical to do it properly in the Godless Faceless Universe we call home, where everyone stands on their own three feet (because without tripods we all look the same), except when you drive a big fucking hearse that causes the Yuppies in your neighbourhood more than a little concern about their rapidly plummeting property values, yet what right have they to complain about **the loved one** attitude? – or personal hygiene, or silly business in the bushes with Personal Spiritual Advisor Dan Bal (Baal?), that reindeer-masked medical shaman trained to converge the rising subterranean psychometric planar realms of Og, just because they're poised for one of the many Eves Of Destruction promised by the ancient ones, and Nostradamus, and closeted film theorists all over the world, whether or not their calling is mere desperation, **the loved one** are desperately looking for a few laughs in this sad excuse for a culture (and killer riffs don't hurt either), until the savage yell "**NOW I SIT IN THE BIG CHAIR**," peals from the prairie thunderheads at the expense of Overly Serious Anti-Chaotic Pretensionoids, who seem to grow like weasels underfoot when the strain starts to show and Dr. Seuss provides the colour commentary for the beauty of chaos playing never-ending patterns at their feet, rolling into tomorrow and the next day, and then perhaps, the day after that, forcing change in the stagnant musical hollow-bombs currently fashionable, by processing the ballooning eruptions of Timorama Cellospace, then BOB reaches you with a subtle tug on your reptile brain, and the Drumulator curls around your spine, but paranoid or not, the briefcase monkeyguys are everywhere, kneading each other to sign the Next Big Thing before it bursts all over them, or the **Kids in the Hall** crush their heads; so, ROCKBARONS fear no more, I've got a deal for you: like new, a multi-piece outfit with drums, lyrics, guitars, bass, evil twins, a cello, Blanche (the severed hand), fractal geometry, smoke (and so much chaos they have to kill 'em all and let God sort it out), and a little keyboard and a toy sampler and an incarnation of the God of Thunder, so it's hard not to cover **Kiss** and **Jesus Christ Superstar** and **Phantom of the Paradise** (because that's what they are), when they threaten to tour North America and explode, a previously unknown side-effect occurring when Kelly reaches critical mass on stage and showers you with his magnificent internal organs, just so **THEY** can sew him back together and sell you the pieces in individually marked non-returnable plastic containers, because the BigRecordGuys know the commercial potential bottled and labelled, waiting to be poured into their pockets. Expect Product. Are they Gloomy? Not terribly. Do they watch lots of Bugs Bunny cartoons? How could they not? **Virus 23** gives them thirteen greasy licks and a toejam football.

A MEMETIC LEXICON

Version 3.1

"An idea is something you have; an ideology is something that has you."
—Morris Berman

What if ideas were viruses?

Consider the T-phage virus. A T-phage cannot replicate itself; it reproduces by hijacking the DNA of a bacterium, forcing its host to make millions of copies of the phage. Similarly, an idea can parasitically infect your mind and alter your behaviour, causing you to want to tell your friends about the idea, thus exposing them to the idea-virus. Any idea which does this is called a 'meme' (pronounced *meem*).

Unlike a virus, which is encoded in DNA molecules, a meme is nothing more than a pattern of information, one that happens to have evolved a form which induces people to repeat that pattern. Typical memes include individual slogans, ideas, catch-phrases, melodies, icons, inventions, and fashions. It may sound a bit sinister, this idea that people are hosts for mind-altering strings of symbols, but in fact this is what human culture is all about.

As a species we have co-evolved with our memes. Imagine a group of archaic *Homo sapiens* with the latest high-tech hand axes trying to show their *Homo erectus* neighbours how to make them. Those who can't get their heads around the new meme will be at a disadvantage and will be out-evolved by their smarter cousins.

Meanwhile, the memes themselves are evolving, just as in the game of "Telephone" (where a message is whispered from person to person, being slightly mis-replicated each time, the message mutating farther away from the original with each generation). Selection favours the memes which are easiest to understand, to remember, and to communicate to others. Garbled versions of a useful meme would presumably be selected out.

So, in theory at least, the ability to understand and communicate complex memes is a survival trait, and natural selection should favour those who aren't too conservative to understand new memes. Or does it? In practice, some people are going to be all too ready to commit any new meme that comes along, even if it should turn out to be deadly nonsense, like: "Jump off the cliff and the Gods will make you fly."

Such memes do evolve, generated by crazy people, or through mis-replication. Notice, though, that this meme might have a lot of appeal. The idea of magical flight is so tantalizing – "maybe, if I truly believed, I just might leap off the cliff and ..."

This is a vital point: people try to infect each other with those memes which they find most appealing, regardless of the memes' objective value or truth. Further, the carriers of the cliff-jumping meme might never actually take the plunge, and may spend the rest of their long lives infecting other people with the meme, inducing millions of gullible fools to leap to their deaths. Historically, this sort of thing is happening all the time.

Whether memes can be considered true 'life forms' or not is a matter of some debate, but this is irrelevant: **they behave in a way similar to life forms**, allowing us to combine the analytical techniques of epidemiology, evolutionary science, immunology, linguistics, and semiotics, into an effective system known as "memetics". Rather than debate the inherent 'truth' or 'lack of truth' of an idea, memetics is largely concerned with how that idea gets itself replicated.

Memetics is vital to the understanding of cults, ideologies, and marketing campaigns of all kinds, and it can help to provide immunity from dangerous information-contagions. You should be aware, for instance, that you have just been exposed to the Meta-meme, the meme about memes ...

The lexicon which follows is designed to provide a language for the analysis of memes, meme-complexes, and the social movements they spawn. The name of the person who first coined and defined each word appears in parentheses, although some definitions have been paraphrased and altered. ("GMG" is the author, Glenn M. Grant.).

—Glenn Grant, Memeticist

Sources:
Richard Dawkins. **The Selfish Gene**.
Keith Henson. "Memetics", **Whole Earth Review** #57: 50–55.
Douglas Hofstadter. **Metamagical Themas**.
Howard Rheingold. "Untranslatable Words", **Whole Earth Review** #57: 3–8.
For a fictional treatment of these ideas, see my short story, "Memetic Drift", in **Interzone** #34 (March/April 1990).

auto-toxic: Dangerous to itself. Highly auto-toxic memes are usually self-limiting because they promote the destruction of their HOSTS (such as the Jim Jones meme, any military indoctrination MEME-COMPLEX; any martyrdom meme). (GMG) See EXO-TOXIC; MEMEOID.

bait: The part of a MEME-COMPLEX that promises to benefit the HOST (usually in return for replicating the complex). The bait usually justifies, but does not explicitly urge, the replication of a meme-complex. (D. Going, quoted by Hofstadter) Also called the *reward* CO-MEME. (In many religions, 'Salvation' is the bait, or promised reward; 'Spread the Word' is the HOOK. Other common bait co-memes are 'Eternal Bliss', 'Security', 'Prosperity', 'Freedom'.) See THREAT; INFECTION STRATEGY.

belief-space: Since a person can only be infected with and transmit a finite number of memes, there is a limit to his or her belief-space. (Henson) Memes evolve in competition for niches in the belief-spaces of individuals and societies.

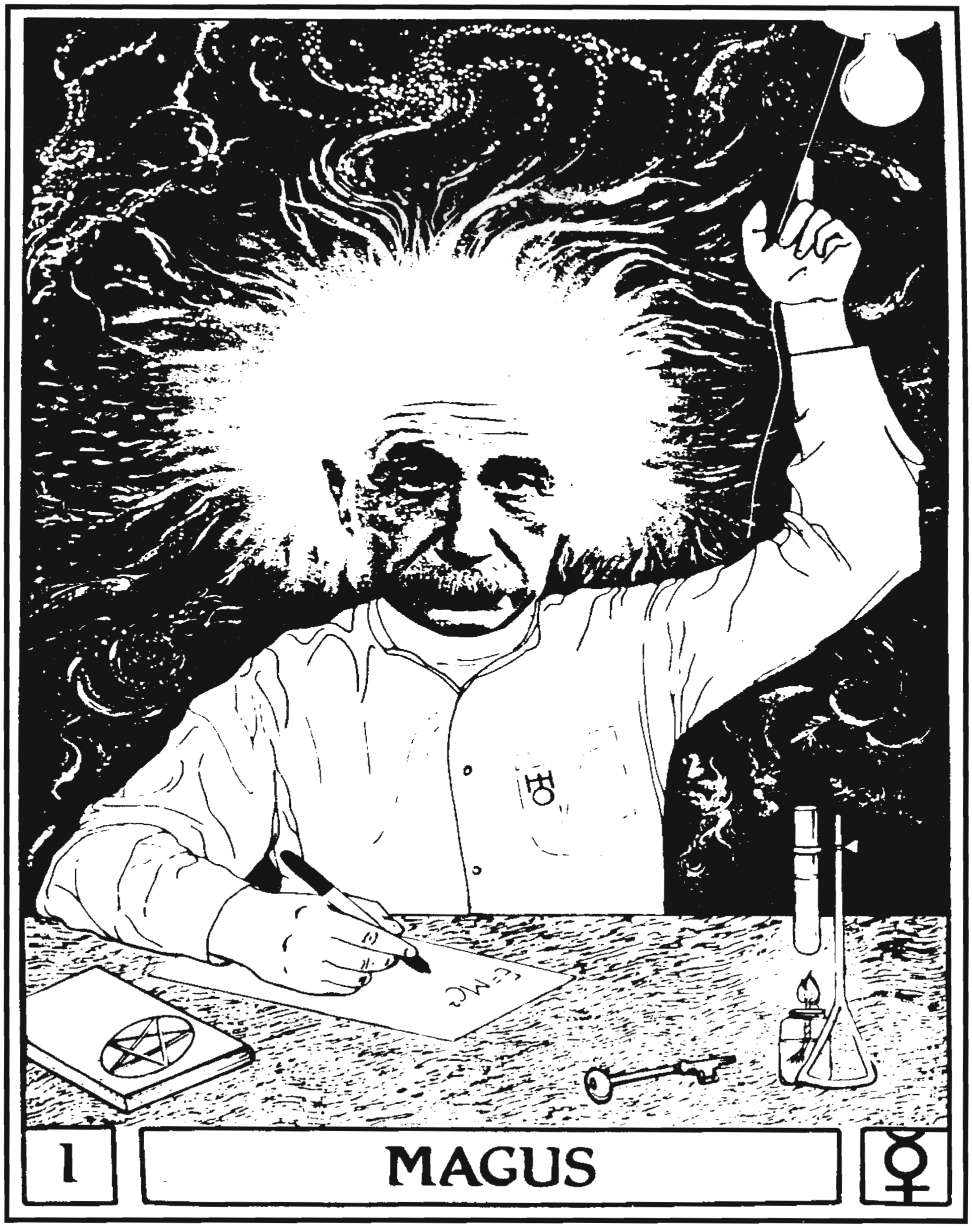
censorship: Any attempt to hinder the spread of a meme by eliminating its VECTORS. Hence, censorship is analagous to attempts to halt diseases by spraying insecticides. Censorship can never fully kill off an offensive meme, and may actually help to promote the meme's most virulent strain, while killing off milder forms.

co-meme: A meme which has symbiotically co-evolved with other memes, to form a mutually assisting MEME-COMPLEX. Also called a *symmeme*. (GMG)

cult: A SOCIOTYPE of an AUTO-TOXIC MEME-COMPLEX, composed of (or recruiting) MEMBOTS and/or MEMEOIDS. (GMG) Characteristics of cults include: self-isolation of the infected group (or at least of new recruits); brainwashing by repetitive exposure (inducing dependent mental states); discouragement of genetic functions (through celibacy, sterilization, devalued family) in favour of replication (proselytizing); leader-worship ('personality cult'). (Henson)

dormant: Currently without human HOSTS. The ancient Egyptian hieroglyph system and the Gnostic Gospels are examples of 'dead' *schemes* which lay dormant in written form for millennia, waiting to re-activate themselves by infecting modern archæologists. Some obsolete memes never become entirely dormant, such as the phlogiston theory, which simply mutated from a 'belief' into a 'quaint historical footnote'.

earworm: "A tune or melody which infects a population rapidly." (Rheingold); a hit song (such as "Don't Worry, Be Happy"). (f. German, *ohrwurm* = earworm)



Endmeme, the: THE MILLENNIAL MEME, *q.v.* (GMG)

exo-toxic: Dangerous to others. Highly exo-toxic memes promote the destruction of persons other than their HOSTS, particularly those who are carriers of rival memes. (Examples: Nazism, the Inquisition, Pol Pot.) (GMG) See AUTO-TOXIC; MEME-ALLERGY.

hook: The part of a MEME-COMPLEX that urges replication. The hook is often most effective when it is not an explicit statement, but a logical consequence of the meme's content. (Hofstadter) See BAIT; REPLICATION STRATEGY; THREAT.

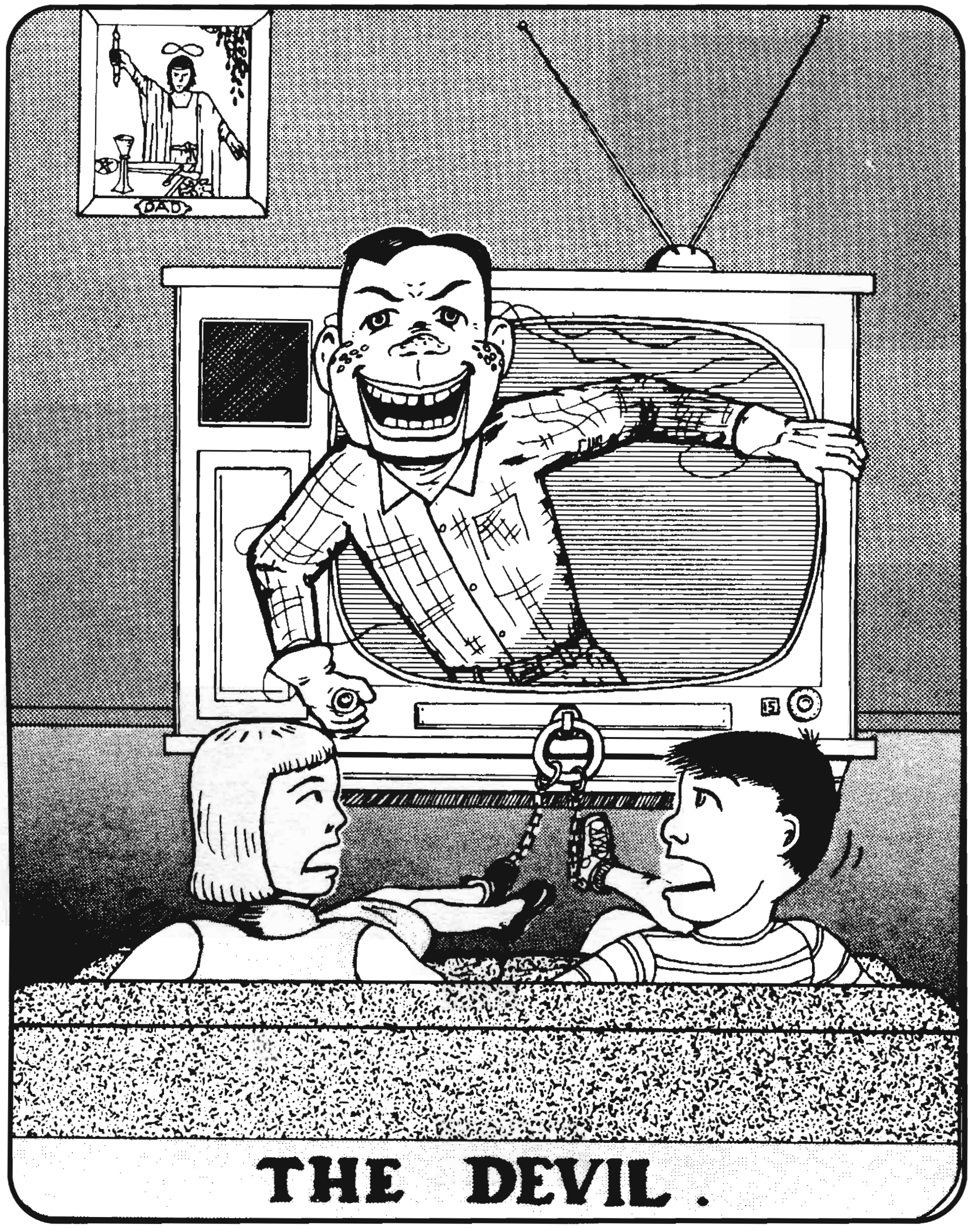
host: A person who has been successfully infected by a meme. See INFECTION; MEMBOT; MEMEOID.

ideosphere: The realm of memetic evolution, as the biosphere is the realm of biological evolution. The entire memetic ecology (Hofstadter). The health of an ideosphere can be measured by its memetic diversity.

immuno-depressant: Anything that tends to reduce a person's memetic immunity. Common immuno-depressants are travel (disorientation), physical and emotional exhaustion, insecurity, emotional shock, loss of home or loved ones, future shock, culture shock, isolation stress, unfamiliar social situations, certain drugs, loneliness, alienation, paranoia, repeated exposure, respect for Authority, escapism, and hypnosis (suspension of critical judgement). Recruiters for cults often target airports and bus terminals because travellers are likely to be subject to a number of these immuno-depressants (GMG). See CULT.

immuno-meme: VACCIME, *q.v.* (GMG)

infection: 1. Successful encoding of a meme



in the memory of a human being. A memetic infection can be either *active* or *inactive*. It is inactive if the HOST does not feel inclined to transmit the meme to other people. An active infection causes the host to want to infect others. Fanatically active hosts are MEMBOTS and MEMEOIDS. A person who is exposed to a meme but does not remember it (consciously or otherwise) is not infected. (A host can indeed be unconsciously infected, and can even transmit a meme without conscious awareness of the fact. Many societal norms are transmitted this way.) (GMG) 2. Some MEMETICISTS have used 'infection' as a synonym for 'belief' (i.e. only believers are infected; non-believers are not). However, this usage ignores the fact that people often transmit memes they do not 'believe in'. Songs, jokes, and fantasies are memes which do not rely on 'belief' as an INFECTION STRATEGY.

infection strategy: Any memetic strategy which encourages infection of a HOST. Jokes encourage infection by being humorous, tunes by evoking various emotions, slogans and catch-phrases by being terse and continuously repeated. Common infection strategies are VILLAIN *VS.* VICTIM, 'Fear of Death' and 'Sense of Community'. In a MEME-COMPLEX, the BAIT CO-MEME is often central to the infection strategy. (GMG) See REPLICATION STRATEGY; MIMICRY.

membot: A person whose entire life has become subordinated to the propagation of a meme, robotically and at every opportunity (such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Hare Krishnas, and Scientologists). Due to internal competition, the most vocal and extreme membots tend to rise to the top of their SOCIOTYPE's hierarchy. A self-destructive membot is a MEMEOID. (GMG) See EXO-TOXIC.

meme: (pronounced *meem*) A contagious information pattern that replicates by parasitically infecting human minds and altering their behaviour, causing them to propagate the pattern. (Term coined by Dawkins, by analogy with 'gene') Individual slogans, catch-phrases, melodies, icons, inventions and fashions are typical memes. An idea or information pattern is not a meme until it causes someone to replicate it, and repeat it to someone else. All transmitted knowledge is memetic. (Wheelis, as quoted in Hofstadter) See MEME-COMPLEX.

meme-allergy: A form of intolerance; a condition which causes a person to react in an unusually extreme manner when exposed to a specific semiotic stimulus, or *meme-allergen*. EXO-TOXIC MEME-COMPLEXES typically confer dangerous meme-allergies on their HOSTS. Often, the actual meme-allergens need not be present in a semiotic stimulus, but merely perceived to be present, to trigger a reaction. Common meme-allergies include homophobia, paranoid anti-Communism, and pornophobia. Common forms of meme-allergic reaction are CENSORSHIP, vandalism, belligerent verbal abuse, and physical violence. (GMG)

meme-complex: A set of mutually-assisting memes which have co-evolved a symbiotic relationship. Religious and political dogmas, social movements, artistic styles, traditions and customs, chain letters, paradigms, languages, etc. are meme-complexes. Also called an *m-plex*, or *scheme* (Hofstadter). Types of CO-MEMES commonly found in a scheme are called the BAIT, HOOK, THREAT, and VACCIME. A successful scheme commonly has certain attributes: wide scope (a paradigm that explains much); opportunity for the carriers to participate and contribute; conviction of its self-evident truth (carries Authority); the offer of order and a sense of place, helping to stave off the dread of meaninglessness. (Wheelis, quoted by Hofstadter)

memeoid, or **memoid**: A person "whose behavior is so strongly influenced by a [meme] that their own survival becomes inconsequential in their own minds." (Henson) (For example: Kamikazes, Shiite terrorists, Jim Jones followers, any military personnel.) HOSTS, carriers, and MEMBOTS are not necessarily memeoids. See AUTO-TOXIC; EXO-TOXIC.

meme pool: The full diversity of memes accessible to a culture or individual. Learning languages and travelling are methods of expanding one's meme pool.

memetic: Related to memes.

memetic drift: Accumulated mis-replications; (the rate of) memetic mutation or evolution. Written texts tend to slow the

memetic drift of dogmas. (Henson)

memetic engineer: One who consciously devises memes, through meme-splicing and memetic synthesis, with the intent of altering the behaviour of others. Writers of manifestos and of commercials are typical memetic engineers. (GMG)

memeticist: 1. One who studies MEMETICS. 2. A MEMETIC ENGINEER.

memetics: The study of memes and their social effects.

memotype: 1. The actual information-content of a meme, as distinct from its SOCIOTYPE. 2. A class of similar memes. (GMG)

meta-meme: Any meme about memes (such as TOLERANCE, 'metaphor').

Meta-meme, the: The concept of memes, considered as a meme itself.

Millennial meme, the: Any of several currently epidemic memes which predict catastrophic events for the year 2000, including the battle of Armageddon, the Rapture, the thousand-year reign of Jesus, etc. The 'Imminent New Age' meme is simply a pan-denominational version of this. (Also called *the Endmeme.*)

mimicry: An INFECTION STRATEGY in which a meme attempts to imitate the semiotics of another successful meme. For example: pseudo-science (Creationism, UFOlogy); pseudo-rebelliousness (Heavy Metal); subversion by forgery (Situationist *detournement*). (GMG)

replication strategy: Any memetic strategy used by a meme to encourage its HOST to repeat the meme to other people. The HOOK CO-MEME of a MEME-COMPLEX. (GMG)

retromeme: A meme which attempts to splice itself into an existing MEME-COMPLEX (such as Marxist-Leninists trying to co-opt other SOCIOTYPES). (GMG)

reward: BAIT, *q.v.*

scheme: MEME-COMPLEX, *q.v.* (Hofstadter)

sociotype: 1. The social expression of a MEMOTYPE, as the body of an organism is the physical expression (phenotype) of the gene (genotype). Hence, the Protestant Church is one sociotype of the Bible's memotype. 2. A class of similar social phenomena. (GMG)

symmeme: CO-MEME, *q.v.*

threat: the part of a MEME-COMPLEX that encourages adherence and discourages misreplication. ('Damnation to Hell' is the threat CO-MEME in many religious *schemes.*) (Hofstadter) See BAIT; HOOK; REPLICATION STRATEGY; VACCIME.

Tolerance: A META-MEME which confers resistance to a wide variety of memes (and their SOCIOTYPES), without conferring MEME-ALLERGIES. In its purest form, Tolerance allows the HOST to be repeatedly exposed to rival memes, even intolerant rivals, without active infection or meme-allergic reaction. Tolerance is a central co-meme in a wide variety of *schemes*, particularly 'liberalism' and 'democracy'. Without it, a scheme will often become EXO-TOXIC and confer meme-allergies on its hosts. Since schemes compete for finite BELIEF-SPACE, Tolerance is not necessarily a virtue, but it has co-evolved in the IDEOSPHERE in much the same way as co-operation has evolved in biological ecosystems. (Henson)

vaccime: (pronounced *vak-seem*) Any META-MEME which confers resistance or immunity to one or more memes, allowing the carrier to be exposed without acquiring an active INFECTION. Also called an *immuno-meme.* Common immunity-conferring memes are 'Faith', 'Loyalty', 'Skepticism' and TOLERANCE. (See MEME-ALLERGY.) (GMG)

Every *scheme* provides a vaccime to protect against rival memes. For instance:

Conservativism: automatically resist all new memes.

Orthodoxy: automatically reject all new memes.

Science: test new memes for theoretical consistency and (where applicable) empirical repeatability; continually re-assess old memes; accept schemes only conditionally, pending future re-assessment.

Radicalism: embrace one new scheme, reject all others.

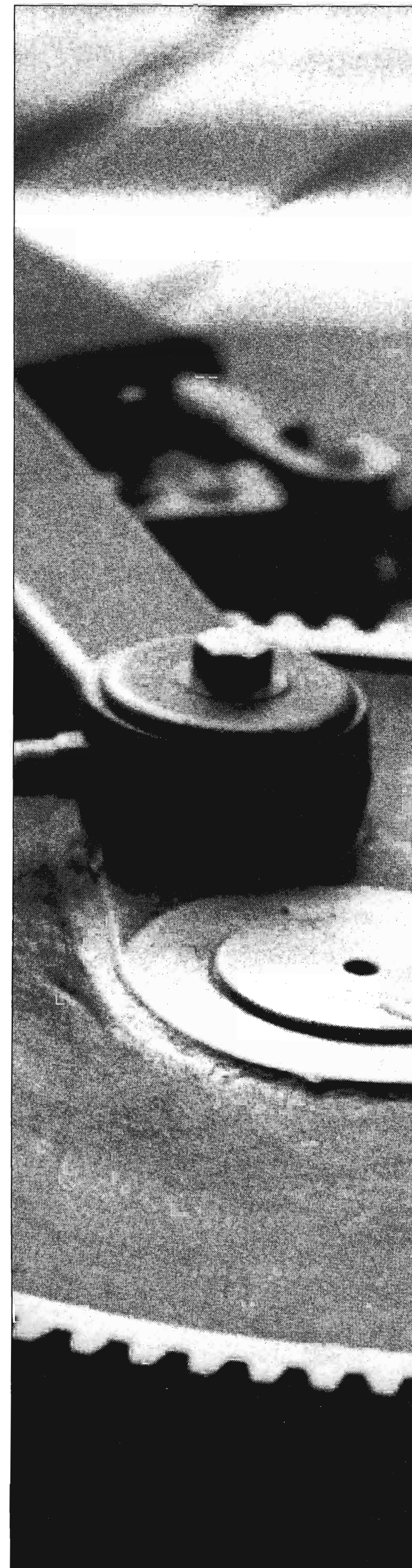
Nihilism: reject all schemes, new and old.

New Age: accept all æsthetically appealing memes, new and old, regardless of empirical (or even internal) consistency; reject others. (Note that this one doesn't provide much protection.)

Japanese: adapt (parts of) new schemes to the old ones.

vector: A medium, method, or vehicle for the transmission of memes. Almost any communication medium can be a memetic vector. (GMG)

Villain *vs.* Victim: An INFECTION STRATEGY common to many MEME-COMPLEXES, placing the potential HOSTS in the role of Victim and playing on their insecurity, as in: "The bourgeoisie is oppressing the proletariat." (Hofstadter) Often dangerously toxic to host and society in general. Also known as the 'Us-and-Them' strategy.



It's almost four in the morrning and we have many hours to go before the printouts are finished so this seems like the appropriate time to thank everyone involved in the Virus 23 project.

Miracles occured with alarming regularity, and without them this thing still wouldn't be finished.

I particularly want to thank the five coolest (and ironically, the hottest as well) bands in Alberta; who played our benefit concert for nothing but a few beers. The Chaos Gig:

- ☞ **The Baffin Island Party**,
- ☞ **The Forbidden Dimension**,
- ☞ **Grandpa's Magick Pinecone**,
- ☞ **the loved one** and
- ☞ **The Minstrels on Speed**.

Without the (totally fun) "Chaos Gig" I still wouldn't have saved enough money and this magazine would be hanging over my head for another six months.

Now You Sit In The Big Chair!

Incredibly generous donations of time, effort and equipment came from Tim Abel, Ana Anubis, Joy-Lynn Dorash, David Macpherson, Colin Spencer and Anton Szlichcinski.

We really appreciated the positive feedback on our last issue. In particular: Mike Gunderloy (you already have a spot in Nirvana), Mark and Carla Frauenfelder at **bOING bOING** magazine. You guys write the funniest reviews, and that can be nothing but good. It would be an injustice not to mention **The Whole Earth Review** people, whoever put us in **The San Francisco Chronicle**, the Greek magazine that gave me the review I'll never be able to read, and that cool guy at Tower Records and Video who reads **Factsheet Five** and ordered a pile of the last issue.

Most important of all, and absolutely essential (to stop those evil nervous breakdowns) are the people who both love and manage to put up with us. Tender Loving Care came in big buckets from Anna, Cathy, Colleen, Dennis, Jax, Jennifer, Jocelyn and Robert. We Love Ya.

Gunnar wants to thank his mom for taking such good care of him (so he remembers to eat at least one meal every day) during the production of this obsessive monstrosity.

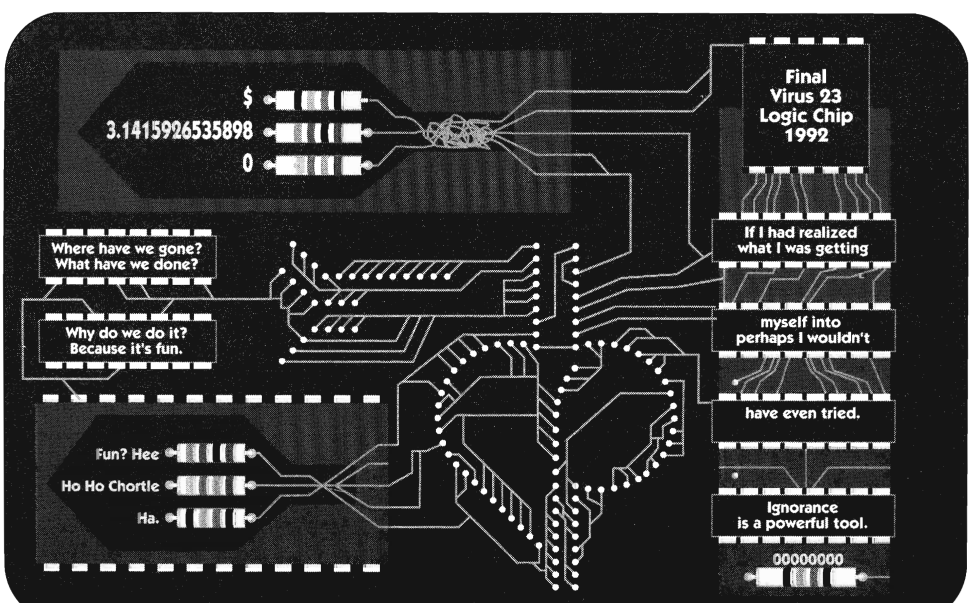
Me and Eric want to say "HI MOM" too! And, "Hi" to Darren's mom, we love your son so much we could just cry!

A special note to Donald David, "Please remember our poor tired bones when you get really rich and famous and the art world bows at your feet."

It's really late and I'm sure I'm forgetting lots of people, but that's the way it goes some days.

It's been fun, hope you enjoyed this experiment as much as I enjoyed conducting it.

—Bruce






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ON THE DOOR!
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OR YOU'LL FIND YOUR GUTS ON THE FLOOR!!

